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LECTURER ON ENGLISH LITERATURE
IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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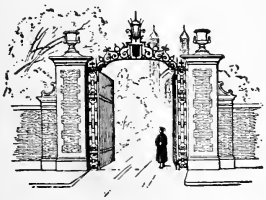

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SELECTIONS.
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PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITOR

This series of books aims, first, to give the English texts required for entrance to college in a form which shall make them clear, interesting, and helpful to those who are beginning the study of literature; and, second, to supply the knowledge which the student needs to pass the entrance examination. For these two reasons it is called *The Gateway Series*.

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HENRY VAN DYKE.

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LORD BYRON

I. Life

George Gordon, afterward sixth Lord Byron, was born in Holles Street, London, January 22, 1788. His mother, Catherine Gordon, had become the second wife of John Byron, a handsome profligate who deserted her and her child, fled from his creditors, and died at Valenciennes in 1791. Till her son was ten years old, Mrs. Byron lived in Scotland, chiefly at Aberdeen, on a meagre income of £150 a year. But in 1798 the fifth Lord Byron died, — the boy's great-uncle, that "wicked lord" who was brother to the Admiral, "Foul-weather Jack." At school roll-call, after the news arrived, the name of George Gordon was read out with "Dominus" before it, and the precocious little lame boy burst into tears, in some mingled and violent emotion.

With his mother and the Scotch nurse who had taught him to read the Bible, the young Lord Byron soon journeyed south in a post-chaise, to live near Newstead Abbey, the family seat, then partly ruined, which Henry VIII granted to "little Sir John Byron of the great beard." Here they remained for a year. Their life together was never happy. "Byron," a schoolmate once said, "your mother is a fool!" And the poor

child replied, tragically, "I know it!" By fits and starts Mrs. Byron was kind to him, but she had a stormy temper, hysterical and ungovernable, and by turns petted and beat him. Once at least she rushed at him with the poker, and Byron defended himself with the chairs. Later, at Southwell, mother and son each secretly warned an apothecary not to sell poison to the other, if it should be asked for. A violent pair, they lived in a tempest. Perhaps what hurt Byron most, his mother once called him a "lame brat." Quietly, but with a terrible light in his eyes, he replied, "I was born so, mother!"

He was born, indeed, with a deformity—a sort of club-foot—which throughout his life he hardly forgot for a moment. The defect appears not to have been greatly noticeable, but he brooded over it always: from the time when, on his nurse's knees, he cut with his baby's whip at a visitor who noticed his foot, crying, "Dinna speak of it!"—from his school days at Harrow, where cruel bullies put his lame foot into a bucket of water; from the days when he jealously watched his cousin, Mary Chaworth, dancing with other youths, to his last hours on his death-bed. His lameness cut him off from many games and exercises, but not all. At Harrow—where he stayed from 1801 to 1805, and where his head-master discovered talents which would "add lustre to his rank"—he not only led all the boys' rebellions, but fought the larger boys who tormented the smaller, and—lameness and all—won six battles out of seven.

Though later of a strikingly beautiful face and figure, he was at this time described by an acquaintance as "a fat, bashful boy, with hair combed straight over his forehead, and looking a perfect gaby." He was conceited as well as shy, and not very popular among girls. We need not be surprised, therefore, that when, in his sixteenth year, he fell in love with his cousin, Mary Chaworth, she did not fall in love with him. She afterward married a commonplace squire named Musters, and married unhappily. For years Byron brooded over this disappointment, but most over an unintentionally cruel rebuke, when he heard Mary Chaworth say to her maid: "Do you think I could marry that lame boy?"

When Byron went up to Cambridge in 1805, you must picture him as a brilliant, vain, sensitive youngster, whom the gyp (the man that took care of his rooms) feared as "a young man of tumultuous passions"; who made several sincere friends, Long, Harness, Matthews, Scrope Davies, and Hobhouse; who found Cambridge dull, and became a harum-scarum undergraduate, sometimes sitting up over champagne and claret till after midnight; who was a good cricketer, rider, boxer, could dive in the Cam and get coins fourteen feet deep, and was an expert shot. His pistols he carried everywhere and fired at all times and places,—alarming people, as he also alarmed them by keeping a tame bear, who, he said, was to "sit for a fellowship." Meantime he published in 1806 a volume of juvenile poems, and in 1807 his *Hours of Idleness*. In 1808, after three irregular years in which he had done everything but study, he

took the honorary (nobleman's) degree of M.A., and left Cambridge for London.

Here he was wilder than ever, and boasted of being so; for he always took a foolish delight in thinking himself very wicked, and in telling everybody about it, with exaggerations. He had an almost insane desire to shock people. Sensitive, moody, he was forever disclosing and falsifying his most intimate nature. His gifts he had not yet disclosed; till a savage, "tomahawk" criticism of the *Hours of Idleness*, in the *Edinburgh Review* for January, 1808, roused him into a rage. Mere rage, but also a stinging wit, made his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* something more than a reply to his critics. It was the most notable satirical poem since the age of Pope. It scoffed at men he knew, and men he did not know; at books he had read, and books he had never seen the covers of. Wholesale ridicule by a youngster of twenty-one, often shallow and unjust, it showed power. A few days before the poem appeared, Byron had taken his seat in the House of Lords, haughtily, or at least negligently. He now retired with a few friends to Newstead, for a long and strange carousal, with the popping of corks and pistols, with a wolf and a bear to tease, and with fencing and swimming, and late hours of wild discussion and ghost stories, while they drank wine from the skull of an old monk. These orgies were doubtless bad enough, but not at all so dark as the readers of *Childe Harold* afterward imagined.

The travels which led to that famous poem now

began. From Newstead, Byron went with Hobhouse and a few servants to Falmouth, and sailed thence for Lisbon. He journeyed for two years through Greece, Turkey, the Troad, and the Greek isles. He dined with Ali Pasha, the Albanian bandit, assassin, and despot; he met the Maid of Athens; and with Lieutenant Ekenhead, he swam Leander's Hellespont, from Sestos to Abydos. After many adventurous wanderings, he returned to England in 1811, "without a hope," he said, "and almost without a desire, . . . sick of poesy," but with "some 4000 lines, of one kind and another," written on his travels.

Within a month his mother died. For all their constant battles and patched-up truces, Byron was deeply affected. Sorrow and renown came to him in the same year. Matthews, drowned in the Cam, was the fourth friend he had lost. On the 1st of March, 1812, when the first and second cantos of *Childe Harold* appeared, Byron "woke and found himself famous." In four weeks the book ran through seven editions. The success was electric. The first edition of Burns, and Scott's *Lays*, were the only popular triumphs of poetry to be compared with this. Sir Walter himself soon gave up writing poetry, he said, "because Byron beat me." Byron, indeed, rapidly followed up his first success with others: in 1813, *The Waltz*, *The Giaour*, and *The Bride of Abydos*, which last he dashed off in four nights; next year, *The Corsair*, written in ten days, sold to the extent of 14,000 copies in one day; in the same year appeared *Lara;* and in 1816, *The Siege of*

Corinth and *Parisina*. In ten years, £75,000 had passed over the publisher Murray's counter, from Lord Byron's pen alone. Byron and Byronic romance became the fashion, not only in England, but all over the continent.

The two most popular English poets of the day, Scott and Byron (for you must remember that Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats were long neglected and obscure), met in London in 1815. They became friends, and afterwards exchanged gifts, "like the old heroes of Homer." Scott found the new-risen genius irritable, suspicious, but also gay and generous. Lord Byron — he afterward said regretfully — could not be happy in the common way. "As for poets," he also said, "I have seen all the best of my time and country, and . . . I never thought any of them would come up to an artist's notion of the character, except Byron. His countenance is a thing to dream of." A child once described him as "the gentleman with the beautiful voice." Lady Blessington wrote that "his mouth was splendid, and his scornful expression was real, not affected, but a sweet smile often broke through his melancholy." And Lady Caroline Lamb, at first sight of Byron, exclaimed, "That pale face is my fate!" We need not wonder that Byron fascinated many women, of high and low degree; and that from 1813 to 1816, he was the social lion of the Regency.

His marriage with Miss Anne Isabella Milbanke, in 1815, was very unhappy. Five weeks after the birth of their daughter, Augusta Ada, Lady Byron left her

husband. Their troubles were discussed publicly, Byron's real and grave faults were magnified by slander, and a reaction setting in against him, this hero of the hour was attacked so atrociously as a monster, a Nero, a Satan, that in 1816 he left England, never to come back.

In Switzerland he wrote the third canto of *Childe Harold*, the *Prisoner of Chillon*, and *Prometheus*. He then journeyed to Italy, where he lived for the next seven years. In 1817, at Venice, he finished *Manfred*, and wrote the *Lament of Tasso*, the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, and *Beppo;* in the next two years, the *Ode on Venice*, *Mazeppa*, and the first four cantos of *Don Juan;* in 1820 and 1821, at Ravenna, the *Prophecy of Dante*, *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, *Cain*, *Heaven and Earth*, and *A Vision of Judgment*. During the rest of his stay, he wrote *Werner*, *The Deformed Transformed*, and *The Island*, and finished *Don Juan*. Meantime he had fallen in with Shelley. The two revolutionary poets lived at Pisa in the closest friendship; and when in 1822 Shelley was drowned, Byron grieved beside that strange funeral pyre on the beach. His own life, throughout this period, was irregular and reckless. Fasting and revelling by turns, he ruined himself by his many excesses.

But out of this sensual existence he rose, to redeem it by a splendid end. From a fantastic, posing voluptuary, he suddenly became a man of action, a practical financier, soldier, and liberator. He had always hated despotism; his name was already linked with that of

Greece; and when the Greek war of independence, after two successful years, seemed ready to fail through dissension and poverty, it was natural that English friends of the Hellenic cause, planning an expedition of aid, should offer Byron the command. On July 15–16, 1823, taking along Shelley's friend, Captain Trelawny, and a few others, Byron set sail from Genoa in the brig "Hercules," with arms and ammunition, horses, medicines, and 50,000 crowns in money. Fondness for display — as his enemies urged — may have impelled Byron at first; but every day disclosed and strengthened his high purpose. From the marshes of Missolonghi, among fevers and turmoils, the poet-soldier disciplined his quarrelling Suliotes, repaired fortifications, directed ships, negotiated for loans, and issued clear and statesmanlike orders. "Your counsels," said the Greek prince, "will be listened to like oracles." Fortune, however, would not suffer Byron to find a soldier's grave, to "look around, and choose his ground, and take his rest"; for a fever seized him in that bog, and on April 19, 1824, he died, calling on the names of Augusta Leigh, his sister, and of Ada, his dead child.

"Byron is dead!" sounded in the streets, said Trelawny, like a bell tolling. Mavrocordatos commanded the battery to fire thirty-seven guns, one for each year of the short life. Lord Byron's body lies with his ancestors in the village church of Hucknall, for Westminster Abbey refused a grave to the author of *Cain*. But his spirit had "led the genius of Britain on a pilgrimage

throughout all Europe"; as for the birthplace of Homer, cities of Greece had contended for his burial-place; and Athens would have laid her defender in the Temple of Theseus.

II. Poems

The Prisoner of Chillon was written at Ouchy within two days, June 26 and 27, 1816, the first year of Byron's exile and one of the few most important years of his life. Byron, always alive to the horrors of oppression, had been deeply stirred by the meagre account of the sufferings of Bonnivard, a political prisoner in the Castle of Chillon, and by the sight of the room in which he was confined. "The Château de Chillon is situated between Clarens and Villeneuve, which last is at one extremity of the Lake of Geneva. On its left are the entrances of the Rhone, and opposite are the heights of Meillerie, and the range of Alps above Boveret and St. Gingo. Near it, on a hill behind, is a torrent: below it, washing its walls, the lake has been fathomed to the depth of 800 feet, French measure: within it are a range of dungeons, in which the early reformers, and subsequently prisoners of state, were confined. Across one of the vaults is a beam black with age, on which we were informed that the condemned were formerly executed. In the cells are seven pillars, or, rather, eight, one being half merged in the wall; in some of these are rings for the fetters and the fettered: in the pavement the steps of Bonnivard have left their traces. He was confined here several years. . . .

The Château is large, and seen along the lake for a great distance. The walls are white."

You cannot better study the processes of a poet's mind in a work of this kind than by comparing these matter-of-fact details with the poem. In any good encyclopædia or annotated edition of Byron you will find material, which you may well use, for further comparison; and your teachers will no doubt put you in the way of seeing some of the many photographs of Chillon and the Lake of Geneva.

The poem is written in a quieter, more chastened spirit than was common with Byron, and it is of superior form to his earlier short narratives. In fact, not only do *The Prisoner* and *Mazeppa* proceed almost wholly without digression, but their sheer speed of narrative is what Byron never attained in his longer pieces and rarely even in his shorter ones. This means also, of course, that scenery, on which Byron and other romantic poets are prone to insist too much, is here fleeting, incidental, strictly subordinate to the story and the impression it gives of Bonnivard. Yet the work would scarcely be Byron's if, concerned with outdoors at all, it did not contain some memorable picture. And indeed the one landscape in *The Prisoner* not only gains by isolation and contrast, but it is one of those triumphs of art in which much is shown in strokes as few as they are secure. Bonnivard, having ascended to his barred windows to catch sight of the mountains again, says, in lines that have been often quoted and that will be quoted many times in the future —

"I saw them — and they were the same,
They were not changed like me in frame;
I saw their thousand years of snow
On high — their wide long lake below,
And the blue Rhone in fullest flow;
I heard the torrents leap and gush
O'er channelled rock and broken bush;
I saw the white-walled distant town,
And whiter sails go skimming down;
And then there was a little isle,
Which in my very face did smile,
The only one in view;
A small green isle, it seemed no more,
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,
But in it there were three tall trees,
And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,
And by it there were waters flowing,
And on it there were young flowers growing,
Of gentle breath and hue."

As definite, you see, as Elim, with its palm trees and its wells of water, in the Book of Exodus. And these lines, so far from breaking the unity of the poem, serve to strengthen it and to deepen the pathos of the whole. The passion and pathos of *The Prisoner of Chillon* are cumulative in their effect, and grow through the account of the prisoner himself, and of the deaths of his brothers beside him; of the madness of the prisoner, followed by despair; of the bird's song, coming suddenly on his solitude and desolation; of his final state, when long imprisonment has made him unfit for freedom.

The fine sonnet, beginning

"Eternal spirit of the chainless Mind,"

which would be impressive by itself, both gains and gives by being used as introduction to the narrative.

Mazeppa has for introduction the lines in which Byron, following the facts briefly stated by Voltaire in his history of Charles XII of Sweden, relates the hardships and adventures of Charles after the disastrous battle of Pultowa, on July 8, 1709. The poet represents Mazeppa, then Prince of Ukrania and an old man, as endeavouring to cheer the king with the account of his wild and terrible ride when he was a young man. Here, also, Byron took his hint — no more — from Voltaire. *Mazeppa*, published in 1819, was a reversion to the manner that Byron got from Scott, and now used with surer effect than at first. After the ride once begins, *Mazeppa* is rapid and fiery to the end, and the episode of the wolves is as preternaturally vivid as anything in *Tam o' Shanter*. Indeed, notwithstanding the length of the work, you will at once see a kinship between Mazeppa's ride and the rides of Tam o' Shanter, Paul Revere, and Browning's unnamed hero who rode from Ghent to Aix. The swift, uninterrupted movement is for most readers the main interest, and for many readers the only interest, in verses of this sort. Yet Byron's narrative, like Browning's, is helped to reality by the rapid succession of objects that take the rider's eye. The steed, the wolves, the stream, the wood, the coming sun, the " thousand horse and none to ride," are all a part of your experience while you read, as they were of Mazeppa's while

he rode. Movement and vision hurry on together in the strong, rushing verse.

The Byron of these two episodic poems is, of course, not the Byron whose genius set all Europe on fire. But *The Prisoner* and *Mazeppa*, like everything else from his pen, were eagerly read, and did not lack comfort for despairing lovers of freedom on a continent where, not without help from free England, the old despotisms were everywhere being re-established.

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SELECTIONS FROM LORD BYRON

I

The Prisoner of Chillon

SONNET ON CHILLON

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art:
For there thy habitation is the heart —
The heart which love of thee alone can bind;
And when thy sons to fetters are consigned —
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.
Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,
And thy sad floor an altar — for 'twas trod,
Until his very steps have left a trace
Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,
By Bonnivard! — May none those marks efface!
For they appeal from tyranny to God.

I

My hair is grey, but not with years,
Nor grew it white
In a single night,
As men's have grown from sudden fears:

My limbs are bowed, though not with toil,
But rusted with a vile repose,
For they have been a dungeon's spoil,
And mine has been the fate of those
To whom the goodly earth and air
Are banned, and barred — forbidden fare;
But this was for my father's faith
I suffered chains and courted death;
That father perished at the stake
For tenets he would not forsake;
And for the same his lineal race
In darkness found a dwelling place;
We were seven — who now are one,
Six in youth, and one in age,
Finished as they had begun,
Proud of Persecution's rage;
One in fire, and two in field,
Their belief with blood have sealed,
Dying as their father died,
For the God their foes denied; —
Three were in a dungeon cast,
Of whom this wreck is left the last.

II

There are seven pillars of Gothic mould,
In Chillon's dungeons deep and old,
There are seven columns, massy and grey,
Dim with a dull imprisoned ray,
A sunbeam which hath lost its way,

And through the crevice and the cleft
Of the thick wall is fallen and left;
Creeping o'er the floor so damp,
Like a marsh's meteor lamp:
And in each pillar there is a ring,
And in each ring there is a chain;
That iron is a cankering thing,
For in these limbs its teeth remain,
With marks that will not wear away,
Till I have done with this new day,
Which now is painful to these eyes,
Which have not seen the sun so rise
For years — I cannot count them o'er,
I lost their long and heavy score
When my last brother dropped and died,
And I lay living by his side.

III

They chained us each to a column stone,
And we were three — yet, each alone;
We could not move a single pace,
We could not see each other's face,
But with that pale and livid light
That made us strangers in our sight:
And thus together — yet apart,
Fettered in hand, but joined in heart,
'Twas still some solace in the dearth
Of the pure elements of earth,
To hearken to each other's speech,
And each turn comforter to each

With some new hope, or legend old,
Or song heroically bold;
But even these at length grew cold.
Our voices took a dreary tone,
An echo of the dungeon stone,
A grating sound, not full and free,
As they of yore were wont to be:
It might be fancy — but to me
They never sounded like our own.

IV

I was the eldest of the three,
And to uphold and cheer the rest
I ought to do — and did my best —
And each did well in his degree.
The youngest, whom my father loved,
Because our mother's brow was given
To him, with eyes as blue as heaven —
For him my soul was sorely moved:
And truly might it be distressed
To see such bird in such a nest;
For he was beautiful as day —
(When day was beautiful to me
As to young eagles, being free) —
A polar day, which will not see
A sunset till its summer's gone,
Its sleepless summer of long light,
The snow-clad offspring of the sun:
And thus he was as pure and bright,
And in his natural spirit gay,

With tears for naught but others' ills,
And then they flowed like mountain rills,
Unless he could assuage the woe
Which he abhorred to view below.

V

The other was as pure of mind,
But formed to combat with his kind;
Strong in his frame, and of a mood
Which 'gainst the world in war had stood,
And perished in the foremost rank
With joy:—but not in chains to pine:
His spirit withered with their clank,
I saw it silently decline—
And so perchance in sooth did mine:
But yet I forced it on to cheer
Those relics of a home so dear.
He was a hunter of the hills,
Had followed there the deer and wolf;
To him this dungeon was a gulf,
And fettered feet the worst of ills.

VI

Lake Leman lies by Chillon's walls:
A thousand feet in depth below
Its massy waters meet and flow;
Thus much the fathom-line was sent
From Chillon's snow-white battlement,
Which round about the wave inthralls:

A double dungeon wall and wave
Have made — and like a living grave.
Below the surface of the lake
The dark vault lies wherein we lay:
We heard it ripple night and day;
Sounding o'er our heads it knocked;
And I have felt the winter's spray
Wash through the bars when winds were high
And wanton in the happy sky;
And then the very rock hath rocked,
And I have felt it shake, unshocked,
Because I could have smiled to see
The death that would have set me free.

VII

I said my nearer brother pined,
I said his mighty heart declined,
He loathed and put away his food;
It was not that 'twas coarse and rude,
For we were used to hunter's fare,
And for the like had little care:
The milk drawn from the mountain goat
Was changed for water from the moat,
Our bread was such as captives' tears
Have moistened many a thousand years,
Since man first pent his fellow men
Like brutes within an iron den;
But what were these to us or him?
These wasted not his heart or limb;

My brother's soul was of that mould
Which in a palace had grown cold,
Had his free breathing been denied
The range of the steep mountain's side;
But why delay the truth? — he died.
I saw, and could not hold his head,
Nor reach his dying hand — nor dead, —
Though hard I strove, but strove in vain,
To rend and gnash my bonds in twain.
He died — and they unlocked his chain,
And scooped for him a shallow grave
Even from the cold earth of our cave.
I begged them, as a boon, to lay
His corse in dust whereon the day
Might shine — it was a foolish thought,
But then within my brain it wrought,
That even in death his freeborn breast
In such a dungeon could not rest.
I might have spared my idle prayer —
They coldly laughed — and laid him there:
The flat and turfless earth above
The being we so much did love;
His empty chain above it leant,
Such Murder's fitting monument!

VIII

But he, the favourite and the flower,
Most cherished since his natal hour,
His mother's image in fair face,
The infant love of all his race,

His martyred father's dearest thought,
My latest care, for whom I sought
To hoard my life, that his might be
Less wretched now, and one day free;
He, too, who yet had held untired
A spirit natural or inspired —
He, too, was struck, and day by day
Was withered on the stalk away.
Oh, God! it is a fearful thing
To see the human soul take wing
In any shape, in any mood:
I've seen it rushing forth in blood,
I've seen it on the breaking ocean
Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,
I've seen the sick and ghastly bed
Of Sin delirious with its dread:
But these were horrors — this was woe
Unmixed with such — but sure and slow:
He faded, and so calm and meek,
So softly worn, so sweetly weak,
So tearless, yet so tender — kind,
And grieved for those he left behind;
With all the while a cheek whose bloom
Was as a mockery of the tomb,
Whose tints as gently sunk away
As a departing rainbow's ray;
An eye of most transparent light,
That almost made the dungeon bright;
And not a word of murmur — not
A groan o'er his untimely lot, —

A little talk of better days,
A little hope my own to raise,
For I was sunk in silence — lost
In this last loss, of all the most;
And then the sighs he would suppress
Of fainting Nature's feebleness,
More slowly drawn, grew less and less:
I listened, but I could not hear;
I called, for I was wild with fear;
I knew 'twas hopeless, but my dread
Would not be thus admonishéd;
I called, and thought I heard a sound —
I burst my chain with one strong bound,
And rushed to him: — I found him not,
I only stirred in this black spot,
I only lived, *I* only drew
The accurséd breath of dungeon-dew;
The last, the sole, the dearest link
Between me and the eternal brink,
Which bound me to my failing race,
Was broken in this fatal place.
One on the earth, and one beneath —
My brothers — both had ceased to breathe!
I took that hand which lay so still,
Alas! my own was full as chill;
I had not strength to stir, or strive,
But felt that I was still alive —
A frantic feeling, when we know
That what we love shall ne'er be so.
I know not why

I could not die,
I had no earthly hope — but faith,
And that forbade a selfish death.

IX

What next befell me then and there
I know not well — I never knew —
First came the loss of light, and air,
And then of darkness too:
I had no thought, no feeling — none —
Among the stones I stood a stone,
And was, scarce conscious what I wist,
As shrubless crags within the mist;
For all was blank, and bleak, and grey;
It was not night — it was not day;
It was not even the dungeon-light,
So hateful to my heavy sight,
But vacancy absorbing space,
And fixedness — without a place;
There were no stars — no earth — no time —
No check — no change — no good — no crime —
But silence, and a stirless breath
Which neither was of life nor death;
A sea of stagnant idleness,
Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless!

X

A light broke in upon my brain, —
It was the carol of a bird;
It ceased, and then it came again,

The sweetest song ear ever heard,
And mine was thankful till my eyes
Ran over with the glad surprise,
And they that moment could not see
I was the mate of misery;
But then by dull degrees came back
My senses to their wonted track;
I saw the dungeon walls and floor
Close slowly round me as before,
I saw the glimmer of the sun
Creeping as it before had done,
But through the crevice where it came
That bird was perched, as fond and tame,
And tamer than upon the tree;
A lovely bird, with azure wings,
And song that said a thousand things,
And seemed to say them all for me!
I never saw its like before,
I ne'er shall see its likeness more:
It seemed like me to want a mate,
But was not half so desolate,
And it was come to love me when
None lived to love me so again,
And cheering from my dungeon's brink,
Had brought me back to feel and think.
I know not if it late were free,
Or broke its cage to perch on mine,
But knowing well captivity,
Sweet bird! I could not wish for thine!
Or if it were, in wingéd guise,

A visitant from Paradise;
For — Heaven forgive that thought! the while
Which made me both to weep and smile —
I sometimes deemed that it might be
My brother's soul come down to me;
But then at last away it flew,
And then 'twas mortal well I knew,
For he would never thus have flown —
And left me twice so doubly lone, —
Lone — as the corse within its shroud,
Lone — as a solitary cloud,
A single cloud on a sunny day,
While all the rest of heaven is clear,
A frown upon the atmosphere,
That hath no business to appear
When skies are blue, and earth is gay.

XI

A kind of change came in my fate,
My keepers grew compassionate;
I know not what had made them so,
They were inured to sights of woe,
But so it was: — my broken chain
With links unfastened did remain,
And it was liberty to stride
Along my cell from side to side,
And up and down, and then athwart,
And tread it over every part;
And round the pillars one by one,
Returning where my walk begun,

Avoiding only, as I trod,
My brothers' graves without a sod;
For if I thought with heedless tread
My step profaned their lowly bed,
My breath came gaspingly and thick,
And my crushed heart felt blind and sick.

XII

I made a footing in the wall,
It was not therefrom to escape,
For I had buried one and all,
Who loved me in a human shape;
And the whole earth would henceforth be
A wider prison unto me:
No child — no sire — no kin had I,
No partner in my misery;
I thought of this, and I was glad,
For thought of them had made me mad;
But I was curious to ascend
To my barred windows, and to bend
Once more, upon the mountains high,
The quiet of a loving eye.

XIII

I saw them — and they were the same,
They were not changed like me in frame;
I saw their thousand years of snow
On high — their wide long lake below,
And the blue Rhone in fullest flow;

I heard the torrents leap and gush
O'er channelled rock and broken bush;
I saw the white-walled distant town,
And whiter sails go skimming down;
And then there was a little isle,
Which in my very face did smile,
  The only one in view;
A small green isle, it seemed no more,
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,
But in it there were three tall trees,
And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,
And by it there were waters flowing,
And on it there were young flowers growing,
  Of gentle breath and hue.
The fish swam by the castle wall,
And they seemed joyous each and all;
The eagle rode the rising blast,
Methought he never flew so fast
As then to me he seemed to fly;
And then new tears came in my eye,
And I felt troubled — and would fain
I had not left my recent chain;
And when I did descend again,
The darkness of my dim abode
Fell on me as a heavy load;
It was as is a new-dug grave,
Closing o'er one we sought to save, —
And yet my glance, too much opprest,
Had almost need of such a rest.

XIV

It might be months, or years, or days —
  I kept no count, I took no note —
I had no hope my eyes to raise,
  And clear them of their dreary mote;
At last men came to set me free;
  I asked not why, and recked not where;
It was at length the same to me,
Fettered or fetterless to be,
  I learned to love despair.
And thus when they appeared at last,
And all my bonds aside were cast,
These heavy walls to me had grown
A hermitage — and all my own!
And half I felt as they were come
To tear me from a second home:
With spiders I had friendship made,
And watched them in their sullen trade,
Had seen the mice by moonlight play,
And why should I feel less than they?
We were all inmates of one place,
And I, the monarch of each race,
Had power to kill — yet, strange to tell!
In quiet we had learned to dwell;
My very chains and I grew friends,
So much a long communion tends
To make us what we are: — even I
Regained my freedom with a sigh.

II

Mazeppa

I

'Twas after dread Pultowa's day,
When Fortune left the royal Swede —
Around a slaughtered army lay,
No more to combat and to bleed.
The power and glory of the war,
Faithless as their vain votaries, men,
Had passed to the triumphant Czar,
And Moscow's walls were safe again —
Until a day more dark and drear
And a more memorable year,
Should give to slaughter and to shame
A mightier host and haughtier name;
A greater wreck, a deeper fall,
A shock to one — a thunderbolt to all.

II

Such was the hazard of the die;
The wounded Charles was taught to fly
By day and night through field and flood,
Stained with his own and subjects' blood;
For thousands fell that flight to aid:
And not a voice was heard to upbraid

Ambition in his humbled hour,
When Truth had nought to dread from Power.
His horse was slain, and Gieta gave
His own — and died the Russians' slave.
This, too, sinks after many a league
Of well-sustained, but vain fatigue ;
And in the depth of forests darkling,
The watch-fires in the distance sparkling —
The beacons of surrounding foes —
A King must lay his limbs at length.
Are these the laurels and repose
For which the nations strain their strength ?
They laid him by a savage tree,
In outworn Nature's agony ;
His wounds were stiff, his limbs were stark ;
The heavy hour was chill and dark ;
The fever in his blood forbade
A transient slumber's fitful aid :
And thus it was ; but yet through all,
Kinglike the Monarch bore his fall,
And made, in this extreme of ill,
His pangs the vassals of his will :
All silent and subdued were they,
As once the nations round him lay.

III

A band of chiefs ! — alas ! how few,
Since but the fleeting of a day
Had thinned it ; but this wreck was true
And chivalrous : upon the clay

Each sate him down, all sad and mute,
  Beside his monarch and his steed;
For danger levels man and brute,
  And all are fellows in their need.
Among the rest, Mazeppa made
His pillow in an old oak's shade —
Himself as rough, and scarce less old,
The Ukraine's Hetman, calm and bold;
But first, outspent with this long course,
The Cossack prince rubbed down his horse,
And made for him a leafy bed,
  And smoothed his fetlocks and his mane,
  And slacked his girth, and stripped his rein,
And joyed to see how well he fed;
For until now he had the dread
His wearied courser might refuse
To browse beneath the midnight dews:
But he was hardy as his lord,
And little cared for bed and board;
But spirited and docile too,
Whate'er was to be done, would do.
Shaggy and swift, and strong of limb,
All Tartar-like he carried him;
Obeyed his voice, and came to call,
And knew him in the midst of all:
Though thousands were around, — and Night,
Without a star, pursued her flight, —
That steed from sunset until dawn
His chief would follow like a fawn.

IV

This done, Mazeppa spread his cloak,
And laid his lance beneath his oak,
Felt if his arms in order good
The long day's march had well withstood —
If still the powder filled the pan,
And flints unloosened kept their lock —
His sabre's hilt and scabbard felt,
And whether they had chafed his belt;
And next the venerable man,
From out his havresack and can,
Prepared and spread his slender stock;
And to the Monarch and his men
The whole or portion offered then
With far less of inquietude
Than courtiers at a banquet would.
And Charles of this his slender share
With smiles partook a moment there,
To force of cheer a greater show,
And seem above both wounds and woe; —
And then he said — "Of all our band,
Though firm of heart and strong of hand,
In skirmish, march, or forage, none
Can less have said or more have done
Than thee, Mazeppa! On the earth
So fit a pair had never birth,
Since Alexander's days till now,
As thy Bucephalus [1] and thou:

[1] The horse of Alexander the Great.

All Scythia's fame to thine should yield
For pricking on o'er flood and field."
Mazeppa answered — "Ill betide
The school wherein I learned to ride!"
Quoth Charles — "Old Hetman, wherefore so,
Since thou hast learned the art so well?"
Mazeppa said — "'Twere long to tell;
And we have many a league to go,
With every now and then a blow,
And ten to one at least the foe,
Before our steeds may graze at ease,
Beyond the swift Borysthenes:[1]
And, Sire, your limbs have need of rest,
And I will be the sentinel
Of this your troop." — "But I request,"
Said Sweden's monarch, "Thou wilt tell
This tale of thine, and I may reap,
Perchance, from this the boon of sleep;
For at this moment from my eyes
The hope of present slumber flies."

"Well, Sire, with such a hope, I'll track
My seventy years of memory back:
I think 'twas in my twentieth spring, —
Ay, 'twas, — when Casimir was king —
John Casimir, — I was his page
Six summers, in my earlier age:
A learnéd monarch, faith! was he,
And most unlike your Majesty;

[1] The Dnieper.

He made no wars, and did not gain
New realms to lose them back again;
And (save debates in Warsaw's diet)
He reigned in most unseemly quiet;
Not that he had no cares to vex;
He loved the muses and the Sex;
And sometimes these so froward are,
They made him wish himself at war;
But soon his wrath being o'er, he took
Another mistress — or new book:
And then he gave prodigious fêtes —
All Warsaw gathered round his gates
To gaze upon his splendid court,
And dames, and chiefs, of princely port.
He was the Polish Solomon,
So sung his poets, all but one,
Who, being unpensioned, made a satire,
And boasted that he could not flatter.
It was a court of jousts and mimes,
Where every courtier tried at rhymes;
Even I for once produced some verses,
And signed my odes 'Despairing Thyrsis.'
There was a certain Palatine,
A Count of far and high descent,
Rich as a salt or silver mine;
And he was proud, ye may divine,
As if from Heaven he had been sent;
He had such wealth in blood and ore
As few could match beneath the throne;
And he would gaze upon his store,

And o'er his pedigree would pore,
Until by some confusion led,
Which almost looked like want of head,
He thought their merits were his own.
His wife was not of this opinion;
His junior she by thirty years,
Grew daily tired of his dominion;
And, after wishes, hopes, and fears,
To Virtue a few farewell tears,
A restless dream or two — some glances
At Warsaw's youth — some songs, and dances,
Awaited but the usual chances,
Those happy accidents which render
The coldest dames so very tender,
To deck her Count with titles given,
'Tis said, as passports into Heaven;
But, strange to say, they rarely boast
Of these, who have deserved them most.

V

"I was a goodly stripling then;
At seventy years I so may say,
That there were few, or boys or men,
Who, in my dawning time of day,
Of vassal or of knight's degree,
Could vie in vanities with me;
For I had strength — youth — gaiety,
A port, not like to this ye see,
But smooth, as all is rugged now;
For Time, and Care, and War, have ploughed

My very soul from out my brow;
And thus I should be disavowed
By all my kind and kin, could they
Compare my day and yesterday;
This change was wrought, too, long ere age
Had ta'en my features for his page:
With years, ye know, have not declined
My strength — my courage — or my mind,
Or at this hour I should not be
Telling old tales beneath a tree,
With starless skies my canopy.
But let me on: Theresa's form —
Methinks it glides before me now,
Between me and yon chestnut's bough,
The memory is so quick and warm;
And yet I find no words to tell
The shape of her I loved so well:
She had the Asiatic eye,
Such as our Turkish neighbourhood
Hath mingled with our Polish blood,
Dark as above us is the sky;
But through it stole a tender light,
Like the first moonrise of midnight;
Large, dark, and swimming in the stream,
Which seemed to melt to its own beam;
All love, half languor, and half fire,
Like saints that at the stake expire,
And lift their raptured looks on high,
As though it were a joy to die.
A brow like a midsummer lake,

Transparent with the sun therein,
When waves no murmur dare to make,
And Heaven beholds her face within.
A cheek and lip — but why proceed?
I loved her then, I love her still;
And such as I am, love indeed
In fierce extremes — in good and ill.
But still we love even in our rage,
And haunted to our very age
With the vain shadow of the past,—
As is Mazeppa to the last.

VI

"We met — we gazed — I saw, and sighed;
She did not speak, and yet replied;
There are ten thousand tones and signs
We hear and see, but none defines —
Involuntary sparks of thought,
Which strike from out the heart o'erwrought,
And form a strange intelligence,
Alike mysterious and intense,
Which link the burning chain that binds,
Without their will, young hearts and minds;
Conveying, as the electric wire,
We know not how, the absorbing fire.
I saw, and sighed — in silence wept,
And still reluctant distance kept,
Until I was made known to her,
And we might then and there confer
Without suspicion — then, even then,

I longed, and was resolved to speak;
But on my lips they died again,
The accents tremulous and weak,
Until one hour. — There is a game,
A frivolous and foolish play,
Wherewith we while away the day;
It is — I have forgot the name —
And we to this, it seems, were set,
By some strange chance, which I forget:
I recked not if I won or lost,
It was enough for me to be
So near to hear, and oh! to see
The being whom I loved the most.
I watched her as a sentinel,
(May ours this dark night watch as well!)
Until I saw, and thus it was,
That she was pensive, nor perceived
Her occupation, nor was grieved
Nor glad to lose or gain; but still
Played on for hours, as if her will
Yet bound her to the place, though not
That hers might be the winning lot.
Then through my brain the thought did pass,
Even as a flash of lightning there,
That there was something in her air
Which would not doom me to despair;
And on the thought my words broke forth,
All incoherent as they were;
Their eloquence was little worth,
But yet she listened — 'tis enough —

Who listens once will listen twice;
Her heart, be sure, is not of ice —
And one refusal no rebuff.

VII

"I loved, and was beloved again —
They tell me, Sire, you never knew
Those gentle frailties; if 'tis true,
I shorten all my joy or pain;
To you 'twould seem absurd as vain;
But all men are not born to reign,
Or o'er their passions, or as you
Thus o'er themselves and nations too.
I am — or rather *was* — a Prince,
A chief of thousands, and could lead
Them on where each would foremost bleed;
But could not o'er myself evince
The like control — But to resume:
I loved, and was beloved again;
In sooth, it is a happy doom,
But yet where happiest ends in pain. —
We met in secret, and the hour
Which led me to that lady's bower
Was fiery Expectation's dower.
My days and nights were nothing — all
Except that hour which doth recall,
In the long lapse from youth to age,
No other like itself: I'd give
The Ukraine back again to live
It o'er once more, and be a page,

The happy page, who was the lord
Of one soft heart, and his own sword,
And had no other gem nor wealth,
Save Nature's gift of Youth and Health.
We met in secret — doubly sweet,
Some say, they find it so to meet;
I know not that — I would have given
  My life but to have called her mine
In the full view of Earth and Heaven;
  For I did oft and long repine
That we could only meet by stealth.

VIII

"For lovers there are many eyes,
  And such there were on us; the Devil
  On such occasions should be civil —
The Devil! — I'm loath to do him wrong,
  It might be some untoward saint,
Who would not be at rest too long,
  But to his pious bile gave vent —
But one fair night, some lurking spies
Surprised and seized us both.
The Count was something more than wroth —
I was unarmed; but if in steel,
All cap-à-pie from head to heel,
What 'gainst their numbers could I do?
'Twas near his castle, far away
  From city or from succour near,
And almost on the break of day;
I did not think to see another,

My moments seemed reduced to few;
And with one prayer to Mary Mother,
And, it may be, a saint or two,
As I resigned me to my fate,
They led me to the castle gate:
Theresa's doom I never knew,
Our lot was henceforth separate. —
An angry man, ye may opine,
Was he, the proud Count Palatine;
And he had reason good to be,
But he was most enraged lest such
An accident should chance to touch
Upon his future pedigree;
Nor less amazed, that such a blot
His noble 'scutcheon should have got,
While he was highest of his line;
Because unto himself he seemed
The first of men, nor less he deemed
In others' eyes, and most in mine.
'Sdeath! with a *page* — perchance a king
Had reconciled him to the thing;
But with a stripling of a page —
I felt — but cannot paint his rage.

IX

"'Bring forth the horse!' — the horse was brought!
In truth, he was a noble steed,
A Tartar of the Ukraine breed,
Who looked as though the speed of thought
Were in his limbs; but he was wild,

Wild as the wild deer, and untaught,
With spur and bridle undefiled —
'Twas but a day he had been caught;
And snorting, with erected mane,
And struggling fiercely, but in vain,
In the full foam of wrath and dread
To me the desert-born was led:
They bound me on, that menial throng,
Upon his back with many a thong;
They loosed him with a sudden lash —
Away! — away! — and on we dash! —
Torrents less rapid and less rash.

x

"Away! — away! — My breath was gone,
I saw not where he hurried on:
'Twas scarcely yet the break of day,
And on he foamed — away! — away!
The last of human sounds which rose,
As I was darted from my foes,
Was the wild shout of savage laughter,
Which on the wind came roaring after
A moment from that rabble rout:
With sudden wrath I wrenched my head,
And snapped the cord, which to the mane
Had bound my neck in lieu of rein,
And, writhing half my form about,
Howled back my curse; but 'midst the tread,
The thunder of my courser's speed,
Perchance they did not hear nor heed:

It vexes me — for I would fain
Have paid their insult back again.
I paid it well in after days:
There is not of that castle gate,
Its drawbridge and portcullis' weight,
Stone — bar — moat — bridge — or barrier left;
Nor of its fields a blade of grass,
  Save what grows on a ridge of wall,
  Where stood the hearth-stone of the hall;
And many a time ye there might pass,
Nor dream that e'er the fortress was.
I saw its turrets in a blaze,
Their crackling battlements all cleft,
  And the hot lead pour down like rain
From off the scorched and blackening roof
Whose thickness was not vengeance-proof.
  They little thought that day of pain,
When launched, as on the lightning's flash,
They bade me to destruction dash,
  That one day I should come again,
With twice five thousand horse, to thank
  The Count for his uncourteous ride.
They played me then a bitter prank,
  When, with the wild horse for my guide,
They bound me to his foaming flank:
At length I played them one as frank —
For Time at last sets all things even —
  And if we do but watch the hour,
  There never yet was human power
Which could evade, if unforgiven,

The patient search and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.

XI

" Away! — away! — my steed and I,
Upon the pinions of the wind!
All human dwellings left behind,
We sped like meteors through the sky,
When with its crackling sound the night
Is chequered with the Northern light.
Town — village — none were on our track,
But a wild plain of far extent,
And bounded by a forest black;
And, save the scarce seen battlement
On distant heights of some strong hold,
Against the Tartars built of old,
No trace of man. The year before
A Turkish army had marched o'er;
And where the Spahi's hoof hath trod,
The verdure flies the bloody sod:
The sky was dull, and dim, and grey,
And a low breeze crept moaning by —
I could have answered with a sigh —
But fast we fled, — away! — away! —
And I could neither sigh nor pray;
And my cold sweat-drops fell like rain
Upon the courser's bristling mane;
But, snorting still with rage and fear,
He flew upon his far career:
At times I almost thought, indeed,

He must have slackened in his speed;
But no — my bound and slender frame
Was nothing to his angry might,
And merely like a spur became:
Each motion which I made to free
My swoln limbs from their agony
Increased his fury and affright:
I tried my voice, — 'twas faint and low —
But yet he swerved as from a blow;
And, starting to each accent, sprang
As from a sudden trumpet's clang:
Meantime my cords were wet with gore,
Which, oozing through my limbs, ran o'er;
And in my tongue the thirst became
A something fierier far than flame.

XII

"We neared the wild wood — 'twas so wide,
I saw no bounds on either side:
'Twas studded with old sturdy trees,
That bent not to the roughest breeze
Which howls down from Siberia's waste,
And strips the forest in its haste, —
But these were few and far between,
Set thick with shrubs more young and green,
Luxuriant with their annual leaves,
Ere strown by those autumnal eves
That nip the forest's foliage dead,
Discoloured with a lifeless red,
Which stands thereon like stiffened gore

Upon the slain when battle's o'er;
And some long winter's night hath shed
Its frost o'er every tombless head —
So cold and stark — the raven's beak
May peck unpierced each frozen cheek:
'Twas a wild waste of underwood,
And here and there a chestnut stood,
The strong oak, and the hardy pine;
But far apart — and well it were,
Or else a different lot were mine —
The boughs gave way, and did not tear
My limbs; and I found strength to bear
My wounds, already scarred with cold;
My bonds forbade to loose my hold.
We rustled through the leaves like wind, —
Left shrubs, and trees, and wolves behind;
By night I heard them on the track,
Their troop came hard upon our back,
With their long gallop, which can tire
The hound's deep hate, and hunter's fire:
Where'er we flew they followed on,
Nor left us with the morning sun;
Behind I saw them, scarce a rood,
At day-break winding through the wood,
And through the night had heard their feet
Their stealing, rustling step repeat.
Oh! how I wished for spear or sword,
At least to die amidst the horde,
And perish — if it must be so —
At bay, destroying many a foe!

When first my courser's race begun,
I wished the goal already won;
But now I doubted strength and speed:
Vain doubt! his swift and savage breed
Had nerved him like the mountain-roe —
Nor faster falls the blinding snow
Which whelms the peasant near the door
Whose threshold he shall cross no more,
Bewildered with the dazzling blast,
Than through the forest-paths he passed —
Untired, untamed, and worse than wild —
All furious as a favoured child
Balked of its wish; or — fiercer still —
A woman piqued — who has her will!

XIII

"The wood was passed; 'twas more than noon,
But chill the air, although in June;
Or it might be my veins ran cold —
Prolonged endurance tames the bold;
And I was then not what I seem,
But headlong as a wintry stream,
And wore my feelings out before
I well could count their causes o'er:
And what with fury, fear, and wrath,
The tortures which beset my path —
Cold — hunger — sorrow — shame — distress —
Thus bound in Nature's nakedness;
Sprung from a race whose rising blood
When stirred beyond its calmer mood,

And trodden hard upon, is like
The rattle-snake's, in act to strike —
What marvel if this worn-out trunk
Beneath its woes a moment sunk?
The earth gave way, the skies rolled round,
I seemed to sink upon the ground;
But erred — for I was fastly bound.
My heart turned sick, my brain grew sore,
And throbbed awhile, then beat no more:
The skies spun like a mighty wheel;
I saw the trees like drunkards reel,
And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,
Which saw no farther. He who dies
Can die no more than then I died,
O'ertortured by that ghastly ride.
I felt the blackness come and go,
  And strove to wake; but could not make
My senses climb up from below:
I felt as on a plank at sea,
When all the waves that dash o'er thee,
At the same time upheave and whelm,
And hurl thee towards a desert realm.
My undulating life was as
The fancied lights that flitting pass
Our shut eyes in deep midnight, when
Fever begins upon the brain;
But soon it passed, with little pain,
  But a confusion worse than such:
  I own that I should deem it much,
Dying, to feel the same again;

And yet I do suppose we must
Feel far more e'er we turn to dust!
No matter! I have bared my brow
Full in Death's face — before — and now.

XIV

"My thoughts came back. Where was I? Cold,
And numb, and giddy: pulse by pulse
Life reassumed its lingering hold,
And throb by throb, — till grown a pang
Which for a moment would convulse,
My blood reflowed, though thick and chill;
My ear with uncouth noises rang,
My heart began once more to thrill;
My sight returned, though dim; alas!
And thickened, as it were, with glass.
Methought the dash of waves was nigh;
There was a gleam too of the sky,
Studded with stars; — it is no dream;
The wild horse swims the wilder stream!
The bright broad river's gushing tide
Sweeps, winding onward, far and wide,
And we are half-way, struggling o'er
To yon unknown and silent shore.
The waters broke my hollow trance,
And with a temporary strength
My stiffened limbs were rebaptized.
My courser's broad breast proudly braves,
And dashes off the ascending waves,
And onward we advance!

We reach the slippery shore at length,
A haven I but little prized,
For all behind was dark and drear,
And all before was night and fear.
How many hours of night or day
In those suspended pangs I lay,
I could not tell; I scarcely knew
If this were human breath I drew.

XV

"With glossy skin, and dripping mane,
And reeling limbs, and reeking flank,
The wild steed's sinewy nerves still strain
Up the repelling bank.
We gain the top: a boundless plain
Spreads through the shadow of the night,
And onward, onward, onward — seems,
Like precipices in our dreams,
To stretch beyond the sight;
And here and there a speck of white,
Or scattered spot of dusky green,
In masses broke into the light,
As rose the moon upon my right:
But nought distinctly seen
In the dim waste would indicate
The omen of a cottage gate;
No twinkling taper from afar
Stood like a hospitable star;
Not even an ignis-fatuus [1] rose

[1] Will o' the wisp.

To make him merry with my woes:
That very cheat had cheered me then!
Although detected, welcome still,
Reminding me, through every ill,
Of the abodes of men.

XVI

"Onward we went — but slack and slow;
His savage force at length o'erspent,
The drooping courser, faint and low,
All feebly foaming went:
A sickly infant had had power
To guide him forward in that hour!
But, useless all to me,
His new-born tameness nought availed —
My limbs were bound; my force had failed,
Perchance, had they been free.
With feeble effort still I tried
To rend the bonds so starkly tied,
But still it was in vain;
My limbs were only wrung the more,
And soon the idle strife gave o'er,
Which but prolonged their pain.
The dizzy race seemed almost done,
Although no goal was nearly won:
Some streaks announced the coming sun —
How slow, alas! he came!
Methought that mist of dawning grey
Would never dapple into day,
How heavily it rolled away!

Before the eastern flame
Rose crimson, and deposed the stars,
And called the radiance from their cars,
And filled the earth, from his deep throne,
With lonely lustre, all his own.

XVII

"Uprose the sun; the mists were curled
Back from the solitary world
Which lay around — behind — before.
What booted it to traverse o'er
Plain — forest — river? Man nor brute,
Nor dint of hoof, nor print of foot,
Lay in the wild luxuriant soil —
No sign of travel, none of toil —
The very air was mute:
And not an insect's shrill small horn,
Nor matin bird's new voice was borne
From herb nor thicket. Many a *werst*,
Panting as if his heart would burst,
The weary brute still staggered on;
And still we were — or seemed — alone:
At length, while reeling on our way,
Methought I heard a courser neigh,
From out yon tuft of blackening firs.
Is it the wind those branches stirs?
No, no! From out the forest prance
A trampling troop; I see them come!
In one vast squadron they advance!
I strove to cry — my lips were dumb!

The steeds rush on in plunging pride;
But where are they the reins to guide?
A thousand horse, and none to ride!
With flowing tail, and flying mane,
Wide nostrils never stretched by pain,
Mouths bloodless to the bit or rein,
And feet that iron never shod,
And flanks unscarred by spur or rod,
A thousand horse, the wild, the free,
Like waves that follow o'er the sea,
Came thickly thundering on,
As if our faint approach to meet!
The sight re-nerved my courser's feet,
A moment staggering, feebly fleet,
A moment, with a faint low neigh,
He answered, and then fell!
With gasps and glazing eyes he lay,
And reeking limbs immovable,
His first and last career is done!
On came the troop — they saw him stoop,
They saw me strangely bound along
His back with many a bloody thong.
They stop — they start — they snuff the air,
Gallop a moment here and there,
Approach, retire, wheel round and round,
Then plunging back with sudden bound,
Headed by one black mighty steed,
Who seemed the Patriarch of his breed,
Without a single speck or hair
Of white upon his shaggy hide;

They snort — they foam — neigh — they swerve aside,
And backward to the forest fly,
By instinct, from a human eye.
They left me there to my despair,
Linked to the dead and stiffening wretch,
Whose lifeless limbs beneath me stretch,
Relieved from that unwonted weight,
From whence I could not extricate
Nor him nor me — and there we lay,
The dying on the dead!
I little deemed another day
Would see my houseless, helpless head.

" And there from morn to twilight bound,
I felt the heavy hours toil round,
With just enough of life to see
My last of suns go down on me,
In hopeless certainty of mind,
That makes us feel at length resigned
To that which our foreboding years
Present the worst and last of fears:
Inevitable — even a boon,
Nor more unkind for coming soon,
Yet shunned and dreaded with such care,
As if it only were a snare
That Prudence might escape:
At times both wished for and implored,
At times sought with self-pointed sword,
Yet still a dark and hideous close
To even intolerable woes,

And welcome in no shape.
And, strange to say, the sons of pleasure,
They who have revelled beyond measure
In beauty, wassail, wine, and treasure,
Die calm, or calmer, oft than he
Whose heritage was Misery:
For he who hath in turn run through
All that was beautiful and new,
Hath nought to hope, and nought to leave;
And, save the future, (which is viewed
Not quite as men are base or good,
But as their nerves may be endued,)
With nought perhaps to grieve:
The wretch still hopes his woes must end,
And Death, whom he should deem his friend,
Appears, to his distempered eyes,
Arrived to rob him of his prize,
The tree of his new Paradise.
To-morrow would have given him all,
Repaid his pangs, repaired his fall;
To-morrow would have been the first
Of days no more deplored or curst,
But bright, and long, and beckoning years,
Seen dazzling through the mist of tears,
Guerdon of many a painful hour;
To-morrow would have given him power
To rule — to shine — to smite — to save —
And must it dawn upon his grave?

XVIII

" The sun was sinking — still I lay
Chained to the chill and stiffening steed !
I thought to mingle there our clay ;
And my dim eyes of death had need,
No hope arose of being freed.
I cast my last looks up the sky,
And there between me and the sun
I saw the expecting raven fly,
Who scarce would wait till both should die,
Ere his repast begun ;
He flew, and perched, then flew once more,
And each time nearer than before ;
I saw his wing through twilight flit,
And once so near me he alit
I could have smote, but lacked the strength ;
But the slight motion of my hand,
And feeble scratching of the sand,
The exerted throat's faint struggling noise,
Which scarcely could be called a voice,
Together scared him off at length.
I know no more — my latest dream
Is something of a lovely star
Which fixed my dull eyes from afar,
And went and came with wandering beam,
And of the cold — dull — swimming — dense
Sensation of recurring sense,
And then subsiding back to death,
And then again a little breath,

A little thrill — a short suspense,
An icy sickness curdling o'er
My heart, and sparks that crossed my brain —
A gasp — a throb — a start of pain,
A sigh — and nothing more.

XIX

"I woke — where was I? — Do I see
A human face look down on me?
And doth a roof above me close?
Do these limbs on a couch repose?
Is this a chamber where I lie?
And is it mortal yon bright eye,
That watches me with gentle glance?
I closed my own again once more,
As doubtful that my former trance
Could not as yet be o'er.
A slender girl, long-haired, and tall,
Sate watching by the cottage wall:
The sparkle of her eye I caught,
Even with my first return of thought;
For ever and anon she threw
A prying, pitying glance on me
With her black eyes so wild and free:
I gazed, and gazed, until I knew
No vision it could be, —
But that I lived, and was released
From adding to the vulture's feast:
And when the Cossack maid beheld
My heavy eyes at length unsealed,

She smiled — and I essayed to speak,
  But failed — and she approached, and made
  With lip and finger signs that said,
I must not strive as yet to break
The silence, till my strength should be
Enough to leave my accents free ;
And then her hand on mine she laid,
And smoothed the pillow for my head,
And stole along on tiptoe tread,
  And gently oped the door, and spake
In whispers — ne'er was voice so sweet !
Even music followed her light feet ; —
  But those she called were not awake,
And she went forth ; but, ere she passed,
Another look on me she cast,
  Another sign she made, to say,
That I had nought to fear, that all
Were near, at my command or call,
  And she would not delay
Her due return : — while she was gone,
Methought I felt too much alone.

XX

" She came with mother and with sire —
What need of more ? — I will not tire
With long recital of the rest,
Since I became the Cossack's guest.
They found me senseless on the plain,
  They bore me to the nearest hut,
They brought me into life again —

Me — one day o'er their realm to reign!
  Thus the vain fool who strove to glut
His rage, refining on my pain,
  Sent me forth to the wilderness,
Bound — naked — bleeding — and alone,
To pass the desert to a throne, —
  What mortal his own doom may guess?
  Let none despond, let none despair!
To-morrow the Borysthenes
May see our coursers graze at ease
Upon his Turkish bank, — and never
Had I such welcome for a river
  As I shall yield when safely there.
Comrades, good night "— The Hetman threw
  His length beneath the oak-tree shade,
  With leafy couch already made —
A bed nor comfortless nor new
To him, who took his rest whene'er
The hour arrived, no matter where:
  His eyes the hastening slumbers steep. —
And if ye marvel Charles forgot
To thank his tale, *he* wondered not, —
  The King had been an hour asleep!

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

I. Life

William Wordsworth, Lake Poet and Laureate of England, has told his own story, and described the growth of his mind, in the poem called *The Prelude*. If you have read this, you know pretty thoroughly what kind of man he was, what sort of life he led, where he went, and what he did, and saw, and felt, and thought. The remaining facts in his biography are few and simple.

Some of these he has recorded for us in the memoirs which he dictated to his nephew, a former bishop of Lincoln. "I was born," he said, "at Cockermouth, in Cumberland, on April 7th, 1770, the second son of John Wordsworth, attorney-at-law. . . . My mother was Anne, only daughter of William Cookson, mercer, of Penrith. . . . My grandfather was the first of the name of Wordsworth who came into Westmoreland. . . . He was descended from a family who had been settled at Peniston, in Yorkshire, . . . probably before the Norman Conquest. . . . The time of my infancy and early boyhood was passed partly at Cockermouth, and partly with my mother's parents at Penrith, where my mother, in the year 1778, died of a decline. . . . My father

never recovered his usual cheerfulness of mind after this loss, and died when I was in my fourteenth year, a school-boy, just returned from Hawkshead, whither I had been sent with my elder brother Richard, in my ninth year.

"I remember my mother only in some few situations, one of which was her pinning a nosegay to my breast, when I was going to say the catechism in the church. . . . She once said . . . that the only one of her five children about whose future life she was anxious was William; and he, she said, would be remarkable, either for good or for evil. The cause of this was, that I was of a stiff, moody, and violent temper; so much so that I remember going into the attics of my grandfather's house at Penrith, upon some indignity having been put upon me, with the intention of destroying myself with one of the foils, which I knew was kept there. I took the foil in my hand, but my heart failed me."

In spite of this anecdote, it is certain that Wordsworth, as a boy, was not at all morose or given to brooding. Of his early days at school he had "little to say, but that they were very happy ones"; he would have us believe that his happiness lay in being free to read whatever books he liked; but we know, better than he could have told us, that he was not the sort of boy who stays apart, by himself, with his head in a book. Some poets, like Thomas Gray, have been of that sort, — shy and sickly boys at school, writing Latin verses instead of playing cricket. Wordsworth, however, played all the games and had all the fun with the other boys.

Don Quixote, *Gil Blas*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and the many books he read were not what set his young spirit alight and alive. The boy who was father to this man, could skate, and handle a boat, and climb trees with the best of his schoolmates. A passage in *The Prelude* tells how, when skating on winter nights with his companions, playing at hare and hounds over the ice, Wordsworth sometimes glanced aside, alone, left the shouting racers, tried to cut across the flying reflection of a star, and chased its gleam along the glassy surface; or how, when he had let the wind carry him along, "the solitary cliffs wheeled by" in shadow, spinning past —

> ". . . as if the earth had rolled
> With visible motion her diurnal round!"

The joy and excitement of such active play, of running about the fields or woods by day and night, first woke and stirred the deep impulses of genius.

After this boyhood of happy liberty among the lakes, Wordsworth went up, in October, 1787, to St. John's College, Cambridge. Spenser, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Dryden, Milton, and Gray had preceded him in that university of the English poets; Coleridge and Byron were to succeed him; but though not least among these shining names, as an undergraduate Wordsworth did not distinguish himself. He entered, a rustic and backward youth of seventeen, and four years later, taking his B.A. degree, left Cambridge with no definite plans for his future career.

He now lived for a short time, and on a small allow-

ance, in London. But he was not for the city, and — except in reveries like that of *Poor Susan* or the noble Sonnet on *Westminster Bridge*, — the city was not for him. He soon passed on, landed in France in November, 1791, was fired with the enthusiasms of the French Revolution, and within a year, feeling that all the hopes of man were at stake, and burning to become a "patriot of the world," had determined to come forward as a leader of the Girondist party. Prudent friends at home, however, stopped his allowance, and forced him unwillingly to return to England.

The reaction and the disappointment which fell upon so many friends of the Revolution, became with Wordsworth, for several years, a settled gloom. This was soon lightened, however, and gradually dispersed, by the companionship of his sister Dorothy. In Dorsetshire first, where Coleridge visited them in 1797; then at Alfoxden in the Quantock Hills, where they had Coleridge for neighbour; and — by the close of the century — at Grasmere among the Lakes, the brother and sister lived in close intimacy and affection; Dorothy Wordsworth's journal is therefore the best gateway to her brother's poems. His marriage to Mary Hutchinson of Penrith, in 1802, brought him great and lifelong happiness, and formed a triple alliance in quiet felicity. The sonnets called *Personal Talk* will show you how they lived. They had a small boat on the lake, a small orchard and garden, and a still smaller cottage, covered with roses, honeysuckles, and a bright profusion of scarlet beans. The sister, however, was the more con-

stant companion of Wordsworth's walks, journeys, and hours of inspiration. The wife, though to her husband's eyes "a phantom of delight," was also "not too bright or good for human nature's daily food," and appears to have stayed by the cottage while the other two tramped among the hills and shores, talking, observing, admiring together. Both women understood the poet's genius, but it was Dorothy who evoked and cherished it, who brought him out of his dejection over the state of man, and confirmed his love of nature. In 1793, when his first small book of poems was published, she saw and named not only their merits but their faults. In 1797 she accompanied him and Coleridge on the famous walking tour when the *Ancient Mariner* was planned, and when the daily communion of these two great poets shaped the first volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*. These ballads were to be romantic in two senses. Coleridge chose to write on supernatural subjects, in such a way as to produce in his readers "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith"; Wordsworth, to write on familiar subjects in a simple style, and to cast a romantic light over ordinary persons and places. A year later the volume was published; and if you have read the poem with which it ends, the *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*, you not only know a good part of Wordsworth's message to the world, but can see what a great and fortunate debt he owed to his sister.

They made many journeys together: to Germany in 1798, where Wordsworth, wandering the frozen

streets of Goslar in a fur pelisse and dogskin bonnet, composed *Lucy Gray*, *Ruth*, *Nutting*, and the *Poet's Epitaph*, and began *The Prelude;* to France in 1802, when he wrote the sonnets on *Westminster Bridge* and *Calais Sands;* in 1803 to Scotland, where they met the Highland Girl on the shore of Loch Lomond; in 1820, with Mrs. Wordsworth and two or three friends, to Switzerland and Italy. These tours, and many which the poet made alone or with other companions, all helped him to write new things, or to finish things that he had begun.

But Wordsworth was never a wanderer; he was a home-keeper and a Cumberland dalesman. He lived at Grasmere with his wife and sister, and his children — John, Dora, Thomas, Catherine, and William. He was deeply attached to them all; and when Catherine and Thomas died, he could not endure living in the Parsonage of Grasmere, where the neighbouring churchyard continually reminded him of his loss. In 1813, therefore, the Wordsworths moved to Rydal Mount, above Rydal Lake.

Here the poet passed the remainder of his days. In 1814 Lord Lonsdale obtained for him a humble post as distributer of stamps for the county of Westmoreland. The work of this office left him free, however, to pace his terraces and murmur his verses (the cottagers were "glad to hear him *booing* about"), where every year a thrush sang in the tall ash tree and doves fluttered their osier cage among laburnum branches. Rydal — Mount and Water — cannot be separated

from his name, — the name of that poet who bequeathed to English poetry all the beauties of the English lake country, and who, hearing "the still, sad music of humanity," was profoundly inspired by

> "A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things."

Thoughts, impulses, intimations which had lain dead for more than a century, others which had never before found utterance, flooded his mind daily among the Cumbrian hills. It was a rugged country, of hearty rains, of visionary mists on heights and in valleys, of still, clear, and delicate autumns. "The presence of a lake," he once wrote, "is indispensable to exhibit in perfection one of these [autumn] days; . . . while looking on the unruffled waters, . . . the imagination by their aid is carried into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable." Masses of rock, hurled down from the slopes into the water, lay "like stranded ships." Tarns, or solitary pools, gleamed black and sullen, with "bold, heath-clad promontories." The houses themselves, of unhewn stone, roofed with slates so old and rough as to be overgrown with lichens, mosses, ferns, and flowers, were "clothed in a vegetable garb," and appeared "to be received into the bosom of the living principle of things." — This was Wordsworth's country for the rest of his life.

While living here, he published in 1814 the long poem called *The Excursion*. He published various

selections of poems down to the year of his death. Nearly all his best work, however, he did between 1798 and 1818. This was the summer and flood-tide of his powers. His later poems, like the *Memorials* (1822) and the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* in the *Poems* of 1822, show a gradual decline and stiffening, and — by comparison — a hollow repetition. The early glory faded into the light of common day. But in these years Wordsworth had waited, and the world had come round to him. Critics had long derided him; the *Edinburgh Review*, attacking *The Excursion*, had told him "this would never do." But by 1837 he received grateful acknowledgments from "the vast continents of America." Two years later he was given the honorary degree of D.C.L. at Oxford. In 1842 he was pensioned by the Crown with £300 a year, as a mark of public respect. In 1843, when his friend and admirer Southey died, leaving vacant the office of Poet Laureate, national sentiment could approve no successor but Wordsworth. The gray-haired poet, kneeling, kissed the hand of the young Queen, ruler of the people whose life and literature he had enriched so vastly.

He died at Rydal Mount, on April 23, 1850, full of years, and wisdom, and honour. All his days he had worked hard, lived simply, and been in earnest. He had never wavered from his purpose, — "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and gracious of every age to see, to think, and to feel."

II. Poems

Boys and girls often find it hard to know Wordsworth well enough to love him, partly because he lacks so much of what makes other great poets attractive. He lacks, for example, direct outspoken passion. *Othello* and *Lear* are as far from him as the lyrics of Sappho and "My Love is like a red, red Rose." Neither drama nor epic is within Wordsworth's power: Michael, Margaret, the Wanderer, and the rest, are but christened aspects of the poet's thought, and *The Excursion*, with all its whistle-blowing, signal guns, and other preliminaries of departure, has been wickedly compared to Robinson Crusoe's first boat.

But what appears to be Wordsworth's weakness you will soon discover to be his strength, for although his range is narrow, within that range he is a master beyond all other poets in our language. The novelty, the almost complete originality, of his attitude and feeling toward Nature, as they delayed any wide acceptance of his work until he was more than middle-aged, so they have kept for Wordsworth a place that is all his own. Before he wrote there had been vague hints and gleams in English poetry of what is in Wordsworth the strongest impulse of his imagination. This most deeply felt impulse is the unbroken consciousness of a soul in Nature. Under rock and hill and vernal wood Wordsworth is sure of a spiritual presence,—a presence that animates all phenomena, from the most awe-inspiring spectacles of cloud and storm and lightning, to "the

meanest flower that blows." For one groping suggestion in earlier poets of the single, unseen life within the many aspects that solicit and charm the senses, there are in this poet a hundred outspoken expressions of belief. None is plainer or more impressive than the following, which must do duty for many: —

"Through primrose tufts, in that sweet bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the very air it breathes.

"The birds around me hopp'd and play'd,
Their thoughts I cannot measure, —
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

"The budding twigs spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there."

You already know how much time Wordsworth passed with trees, flowers, birds, and mountain streams. When you consider how much more he found than the rest of us would find — without a genius to interpret for us — in these wonderful friends and teachers of his, it is not strange that there should have been "a fire in his eye, as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance." Not strange, either, that Hazlitt, who thus read the fire of Wordsworth's eye, should have spoken of his head as having a "drooping weight of thought and expression." The brilliant critic goes on,

recalling (invaluably for you and me) his impressionable youth and first aquaintance with poets: "We went over to All-Foxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of *Peter Bell* in the open air, and the comment upon it by his face and voice was very different from that of some later critics! Whatever might be thought of the poem, 'his face was as a book where men might read strange matters,' and he announced the fate of his hero in prophetic tones. There is a *chaunt* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth which acts as a spell upon the hearer, and disarms the judgment."

It is becoming pretty clear, is it not, that Wordsworth took seriously and sincerely — as indeed, he took all things — his share in the plan of *The Lyrical Ballads*. As we have told you, Coleridge was to induce for his "shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." Wordsworth's task was to be the poetical opposite of Coleridge's. Listen intently while the wonderful poet of the more-than-natural tells what was to be the function of the wonderful poet of the natural. "Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand," says Coleridge, "was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude,

we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."

"The loveliness and the wonders of the world before us!" To make us see what we have never seen before, to lift the veil of use and wont, and thus cause us to see again with delight what has become dull and common in our eyes,—this is indeed Wordsworth's peculiar power. After the first decade of poetic production, no doubt, he exercised his benign power with swiftly diminishing frequency, and by the year 1818 it had almost wholly departed. Mystery and magic had so forsaken him, and left him so reduced in imagination, so hopelessly the prey of prosy, moralizing rhetoric, that the Queen made her Laureate of a man who, though he "uttered nothing base," had for many unlaurelled years —and the same barrenness was to continue through the few years in which his brow was wreathed—had for a weary space uttered nothing of importance to those who regard poetry as one of the few most sacred elements of life.

But if you will put aside all that Wordsworth wrote before 1798 and most of what he wrote after 1808, if then you will lay yourselves open to the magical influence of his briefer (and those the best) numbers, you are likely—I venture to prophesy—to become ungrudging students of the most original English poet since Chaucer. Nor, in this free discipleship, need you trouble yourselves much about Wordsworth's "theory of poetic diction." His practice was better than his theory, and reached all the way from the almost bald simplicity of

We are Seven and the perfect simplicity of *The Daffodils*, to the Miltonic pomp of certain of the sonnets, and the full splendours of the great English poetic vocabulary in *The Yew Trees*. If there is no need of minute study of diction in your first reading of Wordsworth, still less is it necessary for you to inquire into Wordsworth's philosophy, or to attempt to reconcile his famous pantheism — hardened into dogma in *The Excursion* — with an ever closer adherence to the doctrines of conventional religion. Rather content yourselves with the simplicity, the sheer beauty and joy, the "emotion remembered in tranquillity," of the pieces in which Wordsworth is most "impelled," in which he is most the child of Nature and the friend of Man. Of this character, happily, are, almost without exception, the poems offered to you here. Your teachers will explain whatever may need explanation in the celebrated *Ode*. For the rest, an elementary knowledge of your own language, a first-hand acquaintance with the country (by land and water), and a good understanding with flowers, trees, birds, and natural-minded people, will enable you to read Wordsworth with pleasure, and afterward to qualify as pupils in his school.

But, we hear the head of the class explain, outdoors in England is very different from outdoors in this country. English oaks are not our oaks, their cuckoo is not ours, the skylark is *rara avis*, found only in cages, yew trees are not found at all, American rivers are not streams that a boy can jump, and primroses and daffodils — so far from growing by the river's brim or along

the margin of a bay — lead an unpoetic life in pots. All these differences undoubtedly exist, and the head of the class might go on to explain not only that neither "dalesmen" nor peasants live under the Stars and Stripes, but that in social structure and customs there is a century as well as a world of variance between the England of Wordsworth's early manhood and the America of to-day. All these disparities are as undoubted as, for your purpose in reading Wordsworth, they are unimportant. For, even when he seems most to localize his subjects, the picture, the poem, the impassioned meditation of the verse, will make an appeal to readers of kindred minds that is not dulled by time or distance. Wordsworth often speaks of Nature as if she had been born and brought up in the Lake Country, but what he says of her is *lingua franca*. It is for lovers of great poetry everywhere.

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SELECTIONS FROM WORDSWORTH

I

SHE was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleam'd upon my sight;
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament;
Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;
Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful dawn;
A dancing shape, an image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and waylay.

I saw her upon nearer view,
A Spirit, yet a Woman too!
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin-liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet;
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food,
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

And now I see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine;
A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller between life and death:
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;
A perfect Woman, nobly plann'd
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of an angel-light.

II

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove;
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.

A violet by a mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye!
— Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

III

I travell'd among unknown men
In lands beyond the sea;

Nor, England! did I know till then
What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream!
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And she I cherish'd turn'd her wheel
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings show'd, thy nights conceal'd
The bowers where Lucy play'd;
And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes survey'd.

IV

The Education of Nature

Three years she grew in sun and shower;
Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown:
This Child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A lady of my own.

"Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The girl, in rock and plain,

In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

"She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

"The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Ev'n in the motions of the storm
Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

"And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell."

Thus Nature spake — The work was done —
How soon my Lucy's race was run!
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm and quiet scene;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

V

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seem'd a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

VI

LUCY GRAY

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray:
And when I cross'd the wild,
I chanced to see at break of day
The solitary child.

No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
She dwelt on a wide moor,
The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door!

You yet may spy the fawn at play,
The hare upon the green;
But the sweet face of Lucy Gray
Will never more be seen.

"To-night will be a stormy night —
You to the town must go;
And take a lantern, Child, to light
Your mother through the snow."

"That, Father! will I gladly do:
'Tis scarcely afternoon —
The minster-clock[1] has just struck two,
And yonder is the moon!"

At this the father raised his hook,
And snapp'd a faggot-band;
He plied his work; — and Lucy took
The lantern in her hand.

Not blither is the mountain roe:
With many a wanton stroke
Her feet disperse the powdery snow,
That rises up like smoke.

The storm came on before its time:
She wander'd up and down;
And many a hill did Lucy climb:
But never reach'd the town.

[1] A clock in a church-tower.

The wretched parents all that night
Went shouting far and wide;
But there was neither sound nor sight
To serve them for a guide.

At day-break on a hill they stood
That overlook'd the moor;
And thence they saw the bridge of wood
A furlong from their door.

They wept — and, turning homeward, cried
"In heaven we all shall meet!"
— When in the snow the mother spied
The print of Lucy's feet.

Then downwards from the steep hill's edge
They track'd the footmarks small;
And through the broken hawthorn hedge,
And by the long stone-wall:

And then an open field they cross'd:
The marks were still the same;
They track'd them on, nor ever lost;
And to the bridge they came:

They follow'd from the snowy bank
Those footmarks, one by one,
Into the middle of the plank;
And further there were none!

— Yet some maintain that to this day
She is a living child;
That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
Upon the lonesome wild.

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
And never looks behind;
And sings a solitary song
That whistles in the wind.

VII

To a Distant Friend

Why art thou silent? Is thy love a plant
Of such weak fibre that the treacherous air
Of absence withers what was once so fair?
Is there no debt to pay, no boon to grant?

Yet have my thoughts for thee been vigilant,
Bound to thy service with unceasing care —
The mind's least generous wish a mendicant
For nought but what thy happiness could spare.

Speak! — though this soft warm heart, once free to hold
A thousand tender pleasures, thine and mine,
Be left more desolate, more dreary cold

Than a forsaken bird's-nest fill'd with snow
'Mid its own bush of leafless eglantine —
Speak, that my torturing doubts their end may know!

VIII

Desideria

Surprized by joy — impatient as the wind —
I turn'd to share the transport — Oh! with whom
But Thee — deep buried in the silent tomb,
That spot which no vicissitude can find?

Love, faithful love recall'd thee to my mind —
But how could I forget thee? Through what power
Even for the least division of an hour
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind

To my most grievous loss! — That thought's return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,

Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
That neither present time, nor years unborn
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

IX

Ode to Duty

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove;
Thou who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;

From vain temptations dost set free,
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who, in love and truth
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad hearts! without reproach or blot,
Who do thy work, and know it not:
Oh! if through confidence misplaced
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power! around them cast.

Serene will be our days and bright
And happy will our nature be
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
Ev'n now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed:
Yet seek thy firm support, according to their need.

I, loving freedom, and untried,
No sport of every random gust,
Yet being to myself a guide,
Too blindly have reposed my trust:
And oft, when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferr'd
The task, in smoother walks to stray;
But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may.

Through no disturbance of my soul
Or strong compunction in me wrought,
I supplicate for thy control,
But in the quietness of thought:
Me this uncharter'd freedom tires;
I feel the weight of chance-desires:
My hopes no more must change their name;
I long for a repose that ever is the same.

Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong;
And the most ancient Heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong.

To humbler functions, awful Power!
I call thee: I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
Oh let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live.

X

England and Switzerland, 1802

Two Voices are there; one is of the Sea,
One of the Mountains; each a mighty voice:
In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty!

There came a tyrant, and with holy glee
Thou fought'st against him, — but hast vainly striven:
Thou from thy Alpine holds at length art driven,
Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee.

— Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft;
Then cleave, O cleave to that which still is left —
For, high-soul'd Maid, what sorrow would it be

That Mountain floods should thunder as before,
And Ocean bellow from his rocky shore,
And neither awful Voice be heard by Thee!

XI

On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic

Once did She hold the gorgeous East in fee
And was the safeguard of the West; the worth
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,
Venice, the eldest child of Liberty.

She was a maiden city, bright and free;
No guile seduced, no force could violate;
And when she took unto herself a mate,
She must espouse the everlasting Sea.

And what if she had seen those glories fade,
Those titles vanish, and that strength decay, —
Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid

When her long life hath reach'd its final day:
Men are we, and must grieve when even the shade
Of that which once was great is pass'd away.

XII

London, 1802

O Friend! I know not which way I must look
For comfort, being, as I am, opprest
To think that now our life is only drest
For show; mean handy-work of craftsman, cook,

Or groom! — We must run glittering like a brook
In the open sunshine, or we are unblest;
The wealthiest man among us is the best:
No grandeur now in nature or in book

Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,
This is idolatry; and these we adore:
Plain living and high thinking are no more:

The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
And pure religion breathing household laws.

XIII

The Same

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,

Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men:
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea,
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free;

So didst thou travel on life's common way
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

XIV

When I have borne in memory what has tamed
Great nations; how ennobling thoughts depart
When men change swords for ledgers, and desert
The student's bower for gold, — some fears unnamed

I had, my Country! — am I to be blamed?
Now, when I think of thee, and what thou art,
Verily, in the bottom of my heart
Of those unfilial fears I am ashamed.

For dearly must we prize thee; we who find
In thee a bulwark for the cause of men;
And I by my affection was beguiled:

What wonder if a Poet now and then,
Among the many movements of his mind,
Felt for thee as a lover or a child!

XV

Simon Lee the Old Huntsman

In the sweet shire of Cardigan,
Not far from pleasant Ivor Hall,
An old man dwells, a little man,—
'Tis said he once was tall.
Full five-and-thirty years he lived
A running huntsman merry;
And still the centre of his cheek
Is red as a ripe cherry.

No man like him the horn could sound,
And hill and valley rang with glee,
When Echo bandied, round and round,
The halloo of Simon Lee.
In those proud days he little cared
For husbandry or tillage;
To blither tasks did Simon rouse
The sleepers of the village.

He all the country could outrun,
Could leave both man and horse behind;

And often, ere the chase was done
He reel'd and was stone-blind.
And still there's something in the world
At which his heart rejoices;
For when the chiming hounds are out,
He dearly loves their voices.

But oh the heavy change! — bereft
Of health, strength, friends and kindred, see!
Old Simon to the world is left
In liveried poverty: —
His master's dead, and no one now
Dwells in the Hall of Ivor;
Men, dogs, and horses, all are dead;
He is the sole survivor.

And he is lean and he is sick,
His body, dwindled and awry,
Rests upon ankles swoln and thick;
His legs are thin and dry.
One prop he has, and only one, —
His wife, an aged woman,
Lives with him, near the waterfall,
Upon the village common.

Beside their moss-grown hut of clay,
Not twenty paces from the door,
A scrap of land they have, but they
Are poorest of the poor.
This scrap of land he from the heath
Enclosed when he was stronger;

But what to them avails the land
Which he can till no longer?

Oft, working by her husband's side,
Ruth does what Simon cannot do;
For she, with scanty cause for pride,
Is stouter of the two.
And, though you with your utmost skill
From labour could not wean them,
'Tis little, very little, all
That they can do between them.

Few months of life has he in store
As he to you will tell,
For still, the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell.
My gentle Reader, I perceive
How patiently you've waited,
And now I fear that you expect
Some tale will be related.

O Reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle Reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it:
It is no tale; but, should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

One summer-day I chanced to see
This old Man doing all he could

To unearth the root of an old tree.
A stump of rotten wood.
The mattock totter'd in his hand;
So vain was his endeavour
That at the root of the old tree
He might have work'd for ever.

'You're overtask'd, good Simon Lee,
Give me your tool,' to him I said;
And at the word right gladly he
Received my proffer'd aid.
I struck, and with a single blow
The tangled root I sever'd,
At which the poor old man so long
And vainly had endeavour'd.

The tears into his eyes were brought,
And thanks and praises seem'd to run
So fast out of his heart, I thought
They never would have done.
— I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deed
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning.

XVI

A Lesson

There is a Flower, the lesser Celandine,
That shrinks like many more from cold and rain,
And the first moment that the sun may shine,
Bright as the sun himself, 'tis out again!

When hailstones have been falling, swarm on swarm,
Or blasts the green field and the trees distrest,
Oft have I seen it muffled up from harm
In close self-shelter, like a thing at rest.

But lately, one rough day, this Flower I past,
And recognized it, though an alter'd form,
Now standing forth an offering to the blast,
And buffeted at will by rain and storm.

I stopp'd and said, with inly-mutter'd voice,
'It doth not love the shower, nor seek the cold;
This neither is its courage nor its choice,
But its necessity in being old.

'The sunshine may not cheer it, nor the dew;
It cannot help itself in its decay;
Stiff in its members, wither'd, changed of hue,' —
And, in my spleen, I smiled that it was grey.

To be a prodigal's favourite — then, worse truth,
A miser's pensioner — behold our lot!
O Man! that from thy fair and shining youth
Age might but take the things Youth needed not!

XVII

The Affliction of Margaret

Where art thou, my beloved Son,
Where art thou, worse to me than dead?
Oh find me, prosperous or undone!
Or if the grave be now thy bed,

Why am I ignorant of the same
That I may rest; and neither blame
Nor sorrow may attend thy name?

Seven years, alas! to have received
No tidings of an only child —
To have despair'd, have hoped, believed,
And been for ever more beguiled, —
Sometimes with thoughts of very bliss!
I catch at them, and then I miss;
Was ever darkness like to this?

He was among the prime in worth,
An object beauteous to behold;
Well born, well bred; I sent him forth
Ingenuous, innocent, and bold:
If things ensued that wanted grace
As hath been said, they were not base;
And never blush was on my face.

Ah! little doth the young-one dream
When full of play and childish cares,
What power is in his wildest scream
Heard by his mother unawares!
He knows it not, he cannot guess;
Years to a mother bring distress;
But do not make her love the less.

Neglect me! no, I suffer'd long
From that ill thought; and being blind
Said 'Pride shall help me in my wrong:
Kind mother have I been, as kind

As ever breathed : ' and that is true ;
I've wet my path with tears like dew,
Weeping for him when no one knew.

My Son, if thou be humbled, poor,
Hopeless of honour and of gain,
Oh ! do not dread thy mother's door ;
Think not of me with grief and pain :
I now can see with better eyes ;
And worldly grandeur I despise
And fortune with her gifts and lies.

Alas ! the fowls of heaven have wings,
And blasts of heaven will aid their flight ;
They mount — how short a voyage brings
The wanderers back to their delight !
Chains tie us down by land and sea ;
And wishes, vain as mine, may be
All that is left to comfort thee.

Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan
Maim'd, mangled by inhuman men ;
Or thou upon a desert thrown
Inheritest the lion's den ;
Or hast been summon'd to the deep
Thou, thou, and all thy mates to keep
An incommunicable[1] sleep.

I look for ghosts : but none will force
Their way to me ; 'tis falsely said
That there was ever intercourse

[1] Beyond the reach of human intercourse.

Between the living and the dead;
For surely then I should have sight
Of him I wait for day and night
With love and longings infinite.

My apprehensions come in crowds;
I dread the rustling of the grass;
The very shadows of the clouds
Have power to shake me as they pass:
I question things, and do not find
One that will answer to my mind;
And all the world appears unkind.

Beyond participation lie
My troubles, and beyond relief:
If any chance to heave a sigh
They pity me, and not my grief.
Then come to me, my Son, or send
Some tidings that my woes may end!
I have no other earthly friend.

XVIII

To the Skylark

Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!

To the last point of vision, and beyond
Mount, daring warbler! — that love-prompted strain
— 'Twixt thee and thine a never-failing bond —
Thrills not the less the bosom of the plain:
Yet might'st thou seem, proud privilege! to sing
All independent of the leafy Spring.

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine,
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise, who soar, but never roam —
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home.

XIX

The Green Linnet

Beneath these fruit-tree boughs that shed
Their snow-white blossoms on my head,
With brightest sunshine round me spread
Of Spring's unclouded weather,
In this sequester'd nook how sweet
To sit upon my orchard-seat!
And flowers and birds once more to greet,
My last year's friends together.

One have I mark'd, the happiest guest
In all this covert of the blest:
Hail to Thee, far above the rest
In joy of voice and pinion!

Thou, Linnet! in thy green array
Presiding Spirit here to-day
Dost lead the revels of the May;
And this is thy dominion.

While birds, and butterflies, and flowers,
Make all one band of paramours,
Thou, ranging up and down the bowers,
Art sole in thy employment;
A Life, a Presence like the air,
Scattering thy gladness without care,
Too blest with any one to pair;
Thyself thy own enjoyment.

Amid yon tuft of hazel trees
That twinkle to the gusty breeze,
Behold him perch'd in ecstasies
Yet seeming still to hover;
There! where the flutter of his wings
Upon his back and body flings
Shadows and sunny glimmerings,
That cover him all over.

My dazzled sight he oft deceives—
A brother of the dancing leaves;
Then flits, and from the cottage-eaves
Pours forth his song in gushes;
As if by that exulting strain
He mock'd and treated with disdain
The voiceless Form he chose to feign,
While fluttering in the bushes.

XX

To the Cuckoo

O blithe new-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice:
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?

While I am lying on the grass
Thy twofold shout I hear;
From hill to hill it seems to pass,
At once far off and near.

Though babbling only to the vale
Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring!
Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery;

The same whom in my school-boy days
I listen'd to; that Cry
Which made me look a thousand ways
In bush, and tree, and sky.

To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green;
And thou wert still a hope, a love;
Still long'd for, never seen!

And I can listen to thee yet;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.

O blesséd Bird! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place,
That is fit home for Thee!

XXI

Upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1802

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth like a garment wear

The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky, —
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!

The river glideth at its own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

XXII

Composed at Neidpath Castle, the Property of Lord Queensberry, 1803

Degenerate Douglas! oh, the unworthy lord!
Whom mere despite of heart could so far please
And love of havoc, (for with such disease
Fame taxes him,) that he could send forth word

To level with the dust a noble horde,
A brotherhood of venerable trees,
Leaving an ancient dome, and towers like these,
Beggar'd and outraged! — Many hearts deplored

The fate of those old trees; and oft with pain
The traveller at this day will stop and gaze
On wrongs, which Nature scarcely seems to heed:

For shelter'd places, bosoms, nooks, and bays,
And the pure mountains, and the gentle Tweed,
And the green silent pastures, yet remain.

XXIII

Admonition to a Traveller

Yes, there is holy pleasure in thine eye!
— The lovely Cottage in the guardian nook
Hath stirr'd thee deeply; with its own dear brook,
Its own small pasture, almost its own sky!

But covet not the abode; forbear to sigh
As many do, repining while they look;
Intruders — who would tear from Nature's book
This precious leaf with harsh impiety.

— Think what the home must be if it were thine,
Even thine, though few thy wants! — Roof, window, door,
The very flowers are sacred to the Poor,

The roses to the porch which they entwine:
Yea, all that now enchants thee, from the day
On which it should be touch'd, would melt away!

XXIV

To the Highland Girl of Inversneyde

Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower
Of beauty is thy earthly dower!
Twice seven consenting years have shed
Their utmost bounty on thy head:
And these gray rocks, that household lawn,
Those trees — a veil just half withdrawn,
This fall of water that doth make
A murmur near the silent lake,
This little bay, a quiet road
That holds in shelter thy abode;
In truth together ye do seem
Like something fashion'd in a dream;
Such forms as from their covert peep
When earthly cares are laid asleep!

But O fair Creature! in the light
Of common day, so heavenly bright,
I bless Thee, Vision as thou art,
I bless thee with a human heart:
God shield thee to thy latest years!
Thee neither know I nor thy peers:
And yet my eyes are fill'd with tears.

With earnest feeling I shall pray
For thee when I am far away;
For never saw I mien or face
In which more plainly I could trace
Benignity and home-bred sense
Ripening in perfect innocence.
Here scatter'd, like a random seed,
Remote from men, Thou dost not need
The embarrass'd look of shy distress,
And maidenly shamefacédness:
Thou wear'st upon thy forehead clear
The freedom of a Mountaineer:
A face with gladness overspread;
Soft smiles, by human kindness bred;
And seemliness complete, that sways
Thy courtesies, about thee plays;
With no restraint, but such as springs
From quick and eager visitings
Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach
Of thy few words of English speech:
A bondage sweetly brook'd, a strife
That gives thy gestures grace and life!

So have I, not unmoved in mind,
Seen birds of tempest-loving kind —
Thus beating up against the wind.

What hand but would a garland cull
For thee who art so beautiful?
O happy pleasure! here to dwell
Beside thee in some heathy dell;
Adopt your homely ways, and dress,
A shepherd, thou a shepherdess!
But I could frame a wish for thee
More like a grave reality:
Thou art to me but as a wave
Of the wild sea: and I would have
Some claim upon thee, if I could,
Though but of common neighbourhood.
What joy to hear thee, and to see!
Thy elder brother I would be,
Thy father — anything to thee.

Now thanks to Heaven! that of its grace
Hath led me to this lonely place:
Joy have I had; and going hence
I bear away my recompense.
In spots like these it is we prize
Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes:
Then why should I be loth to stir?
I feel this place was made for her;
To give new pleasure like the past,
Continued long as life shall last.

Nor am I loth, though pleased at heart,
Sweet Highland Girl! from thee to part;
For I, methinks, till I grow old
As fair before me shall behold
As I do now, the cabin small,
The lake, the bay, the waterfall;
And Thee, the Spirit of them all!

XXV

The Reaper

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands;
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again!

Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listen'd, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

XXVI

The Reverie of Poor Susan

At the corner of Wood Street when daylight appears,
Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years:
Poor Susan has pass'd by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale
Down which she so often has tripp'd with her pail;
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade;
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all pass'd away from her eyes!

XXVII

The Daffodils

I wander'd lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretch'd in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay;
Ten thousand saw I at a glance
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:—
A Poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company!

I gazed — and gazed — but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought;

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

XXVIII

To the Daisy

With little here to do or see
Of things that in the great world be,
Sweet Daisy! oft I talk to thee
For thou art worthy,
Thou unassuming Common-place
Of Nature, with that homely face,
And yet with something of a grace
Which Love makes for thee!

Oft on the dappled turf at ease
I sit and play with similes,
Loose types of things through all degrees,
Thoughts of thy raising;
And many a fond and idle name
I give to thee, for praise or blame
As is the humour of the game,
While I am gazing.

A nun demure, of lowly port;
Or sprightly maiden, of Love's court,
In thy simplicity the sport
Of all temptations;
A queen in crown of rubies drest;
A starveling in a scanty vest;
Are all, as seems to suit thee best,
Thy appellations.

A little Cyclops, with one eye
Staring to threaten and defy,
That thought comes next — and instantly
The freak is over,
The shape will vanish, and behold!
A silver shield with boss[1] of gold
That spreads itself, some faery bold
In fight to cover.

I see thee glittering from afar —
And then thou art a pretty star,
Not quite so fair as many are
In heaven above thee!
Yet like a star, with glittering crest,
Self-poised in air thou seem'st to rest; —
May peace come never to his nest
Who shall reprove thee!

Sweet Flower! for by that name at last
When all my reveries are past
I call thee, and to that cleave fast,
Sweet silent Creature!

[1] Knob, or circular ornament.

That breath'st with me in sun and air,
Do thou, as thou art wont, repair
My heart with gladness, and a share
Of thy meek nature!

XXIX

Yarrow Unvisited

1803

From Stirling Castle we had seen
The mazy Forth unravell'd,
Had trod the banks of Clyde and Tay
And with the Tweed had travell'd;
And when we came to Clovenford,
Then said my 'winsome Marrow,'[1]
'Whate'er betide, we'll turn aside,
And see the Braes of Yarrow.'

'Let Yarrow folk, frae Selkirk town,
Who have been buying, selling,
Go back to Yarrow, 'tis their own,
Each maiden to her dwelling!
On Yarrow's banks let herons feed,
Hares couch, and rabbits burrow;
But we will downward with the Tweed,
Nor turn aside to Yarrow.

[1] Mate.

'There's Gala Water, Leader Haughs,
Both lying right before us;
And Dryburgh, where with chiming Tweed
The lintwhites sing in chorus;
There's pleasant Tiviot-dale, a land
Made blithe with plough and harrow:
Why throw away a needful day
To go in search of Yarrow?

'What's Yarrow but a river bare
That glides the dark hills under?
There are a thousand such elsewhere
As worthy of your wonder.'
— Strange words they seem'd of slight and scorn;
My True-love sigh'd for sorrow,
And look'd me in the face, to think
I thus could speak of Yarrow!

'O green,' said I, 'are Yarrow's holms,
And sweet is Yarrow flowing!
Fair hangs the apple frae the rock,
But we will leave it growing.
O'er hilly path and open strath
We'll wander Scotland thorough;
But, though so near, we will not turn
Into the dale of Yarrow.

'Let beeves and home-bred kine partake
The sweets of Burn-mill meadow;
The swan on still Saint Mary's Lake
Float double, swan and shadow!

We will not see them; will not go
To-day, nor yet to-morrow;
Enough if in our hearts we know
There's such a place as Yarrow.

'Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown!
It must, or we shall rue it:
We have a vision of our own,
Ah! why should we undo it?
The treasured dreams of times long past,
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow!
For when we're there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow!

'If Care with freezing years should come
And wandering seem but folly,—
Should we be loth to stir from home,
And yet be melancholy;
Should life be dull, and spirits low,
'Twill soothe us in our sorrow
That earth has something yet to show,
The bonny holms of Yarrow!'

XXX

Yarrow Visited

September, 1814

And is this — Yarrow? — This the stream
Of which my fancy cherish'd

So faithfully, a waking dream,
An image that hath perish'd?
O that some minstrel's harp were near
To utter notes of gladness
And chase this silence from the air,
That fills my heart with sadness!

Yet why? — a silvery current flows
With uncontroll'd meanderings;
Nor have these eyes by greener hills
Been soothed, in all my wanderings.
And, through her depths, Saint Mary's Lake
Is visibly delighted;
For not a feature of those hills
Is in the mirror slighted.

A blue sky bends o'er Yarrow Vale
Save where that pearly whiteness
Is round the rising sun diffused,
A tender hazy brightness;
Mild dawn of promise! that excludes
All profitless dejection;
Though not unwilling here to admit
A pensive recollection.

Where was it that the famous Flower
Of Yarrow Vale lay bleeding?
His bed perchance was yon smooth mound
On which the herd is feeding:
And haply from this crystal pool,
Now peaceful as the morning,

The Water-wraith [1] ascended thrice,
And gave his doleful warning.

Delicious is the lay that sings
The haunts of happy lovers,
The path that leads them to the grove,
The leafy grove that covers:
And pity sanctifies the verse
That paints, by strength of sorrow,
The unconquerable strength of love;
Bear witness, rueful Yarrow!

But thou that didst appear so fair
To fond imagination,
Dost rival in the light of day
Her delicate creation:
Meek loveliness is round thee spread,
A softness still and holy:
The grace of forest charms decay'd,
And pastoral melancholy.

That region left, the vale unfolds
Rich groves of lofty stature,
With Yarrow winding through the pomp
Of cultivated nature;
And rising from those lofty groves
Behold a ruin hoary,
The shatter'd front of Newark's towers,
Renown'd in Border story.

[1] Water-spirit.

Fair scenes for childhood's opening bloom,
For sportive youth to stray in,
For manhood to enjoy his strength,
And age to wear away in!
Yon cottage seems a bower of bliss,
A covert for protection
Of tender thoughts that nestle there
The brood of chaste affection.

How sweet on this autumnal day
The wild-wood fruits to gather,
And on my True-love's forehead plant
A crest of blooming heather!
And what if I enwreathed my own?
'Twere no offence to reason;
The sober hills thus deck their brows
To meet the wintry season.

I see — but not by sight alone,
Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;
A ray of Fancy still survives —
Her sunshine plays upon thee!
Thy ever-youthful waters keep
A course of lively pleasure;
And gladsome notes my lips can breathe
Accordant to the measure.

The vapours linger round the heights,
They melt, and soon must vanish;
One hour is theirs, nor more is mine —
Sad thought! which I would banish,

But that I know, where'er I go,
Thy genuine image, Yarrow!
Will dwell with me, to heighten joy,
And cheer my mind in sorrow.

XXXI

By the Sea

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;

The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder — everlastingly.

Dear child! dear girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouch'd by solemn thought
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:

Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

XXXII

To Sleep

A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by
One after one; the sound of rain, and bees
Murmuring; the fall of rivers, winds and seas,
Smooth fields, white sheets of water, and pure sky;

I've thought of all by turns, and yet do lie
Sleepless; and soon the small birds' melodies
Must hear, first utter'd from my orchard trees,
And the first cuckoo's melancholy cry.

Even thus last night, and two nights more I lay,
And could not win thee, Sleep! by any stealth:
So do not let me wear to-night away:

Without Thee what is all the morning's wealth?
Come, blesséd barrier between day and day,
Dear mother of fresh thoughts and joyous health!

XXXIII

The Inner Vision

Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes
To pace the ground, if path be there or none,
While a fair region round the traveller lies
Which he forbears again to look upon;

Pleased rather with some soft ideal scene,
The work of Fancy, or some happy tone
Of meditation, slipping in between
The beauty coming and the beauty gone.

— If Thought and Love desert us, from that day
Let us break off all commerce with the Muse:
With Thought and Love companions of our way —

Whate'er the senses take or may refuse, —
The Mind's internal heaven shall shed her dews
Of inspiration on the humblest lay.

XXXIV

Written in Early Spring

I heard a thousand blended notes
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What Man has made of Man.

Through primrose tufts, in that sweet bower,
The periwinkle trail'd its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopp'd and play'd,
Their thoughts I cannot measure,—
But the least motion which they made
It seem'd a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What Man has made of Man?

XXXV

Ruth: or the Influences of Nature

When Ruth was left half desolate
Her father took another mate;
And Ruth, not seven years old,
A slighted child, at her own will
Went wandering over dale and hill,
In thoughtless freedom, bold.

And she had made a pipe of straw,
And music from that pipe could draw
Like sounds of winds and floods;
Had built a bower upon the green,
As if she from her birth had been
An infant of the woods.

Beneath her father's roof, alone
She seem'd to live; her thoughts her own;
Herself her own delight:
Pleased with herself, nor sad nor gay;
And passing thus the live-long day,
She grew to woman's height.

There came a youth from Georgia's shore —
A military casque [2] he wore
With splendid feathers drest;
He brought them from the Cherokees;
The feathers nodded in the breeze
And made a gallant crest.

[1] Helmet.

From Indian blood you deem him sprung:
But no! he spake the English tongue
And bore a soldier's name;
And, when America was free
From battle and from jeopardy,
He 'cross the ocean came.

With hues of genius on his cheek,
In finest tones the youth could speak:
— While he was yet a boy
The moon, the glory of the sun,
And streams that murmur as they run
Had been his dearest joy.

He was a lovely youth! I guess
The panther in the wilderness
Was not so fair as he;
And when he chose to sport and play,
No dolphin ever was so gay
Upon the tropic sea.

Among the Indians he had fought;
And with him many tales he brought
Of pleasure and of fear;
Such tales as, told to any maid
By such a youth, in the green shade,
Were perilous to hear.

He told of girls, a happy rout!
Who quit their fold with dance and shout,
Their pleasant Indian town,

To gather strawberries all day long;
Returning with a choral song
When daylight is gone down.

He spake of plants that hourly change
Their blossoms, through a boundless range
Of intermingling hues;
With budding, fading, faded flowers,
They stand the wonder of the bowers
From morn to evening dews.

He told of the magnolia, spread
High as a cloud, high over head!
The cypress and her spire;
— Of flowers that with one scarlet gleam
Cover a hundred leagues, and seem
To set the hills on fire.

The youth of green savannahs spake,
And many an endless, endless lake
With all its fairy crowds
Of islands, that together lie
As quietly as spots of sky
Among the evening clouds.

'How pleasant,' then he said, 'it were
A fisher or a hunter there,
In sunshine or in shade
To wander with an easy mind,
And build a household fire, and find
A home in every glade!

'What days and what bright years! Ah me!
Our life were life indeed, with thee
So pass'd in quiet bliss;
And all the while,' said he, 'to know
That we were in a world of woe,
On such an earth as this!'

And then he sometimes interwove
Fond thoughts about a father's love,
'For there,' said he, 'are spun
Around the heart such tender ties,
That our own children to our eyes
Are dearer than the sun.

'Sweet Ruth! and could you go with me
My helpmate in the woods to be,
Our shed at night to rear;
Or run, my own adopted bride,
A sylvan huntress at my side,
And drive the flying deer!

'Beloved Ruth!'—No more he said.
The wakeful Ruth at midnight shed
A solitary tear:
She thought again—and did agree
With him to sail across the sea,
And drive the flying deer.

'And now, as fitting is and right,
We in the church our faith will plight,
A husband and a wife.'

Even so they did; and I may say
That to sweet Ruth that happy day
Was more than human life.

Through dream and vision did she sink,
Delighted all the while to think
That, on those lonesome floods
And green savannahs, she should share
His board with lawful joy, and bear
His name in the wild woods.

But, as you have before been told,
This Stripling, sportive, gay, and bold,
And with his dancing crest
So beautiful, through savage lands
Had roam'd about, with vagrant bands
Of Indians in the West.

The wind, the tempest roaring high,
The tumult of a tropic sky
Might well be dangerous food
For him, a youth to whom was given
So much of earth — so much of heaven,
And such impetuous blood.

Whatever in those climes he found
Irregular in sight or sound
Did to his mind impart
A kindred impulse, seem'd allied
To his own powers, and justified
The workings of his heart.

Nor less, to feed voluptuous thought,
The beauteous forms of Nature wrought, —
Fair trees and gorgeous flowers;
The breezes their own languor lent;
The stars had feelings, which they sent
Into those favour'd bowers.

Yet, in his worst pursuits, I ween
That sometimes there did intervene
Pure hopes of high intent:
For passions link'd to forms so fair
And stately, needs must have their share
Of noble sentiment.

But ill he lived, much evil saw,
With men to whom no better law
Nor better life was known;
Deliberately and undeceived
Those wild men's vices he received,
And gave them back his own.

His genius and his moral frame
Were thus impair'd, and he became
The slave of low desires:
A man who without self-control
Would seek what the degraded soul
Unworthily admires.

And yet he with no feign'd delight
Had woo'd the maiden, day and night
Had loved her, night and morn:

What could he less than love a maid
Whose heart with so much nature play'd —
So kind and so forlorn?

Sometimes most earnestly he said,
'O Ruth! I have been worse than dead;
False thoughts, thoughts bold and vain
Encompass'd me on every side
When I, in confidence and pride,
Had cross'd the Atlantic main.

'Before me shone a glorious world
Fresh as a banner bright, unfurl'd
To music suddenly:
I look'd upon those hills and plains,
And seem'd as if let loose from chains
To live at liberty!

'No more of this — for now, by thee,
Dear Ruth! more happily set free,
With nobler zeal I burn;
My soul from darkness is released
Like the whole sky when to the east
The morning doth return.'

Full soon that better mind was gone;
No hope, no wish remain'd, not one, —
They stirr'd him now no more;
New objects did new pleasure give,
And once again he wish'd to live
As lawless as before.

Meanwhile, as thus with him it fared,
They for the voyage were prepared,
And went to the sea-shore:
But, when they thither came, the youth
Deserted his poor bride, and Ruth
Could never find him more.

God help thee, Ruth! — Such pains she had
That she in half a year was mad
And in a prison housed;
And there, with many a doleful song
Made of wild words, her cup of wrong
She fearfully caroused.

Yet sometimes milder hours she knew,
Nor wanted sun, nor rain, nor dew,
Nor pastimes of the May,
— They all were with her in her cell;
And a clear brook with cheerful knell
Did o'er the pebbles play.

When Ruth three seasons thus had lain,
There came a respite to her pain;
She from her prison fled;
But of the Vagrant none took thought;
And where it liked her best she sought
Her shelter and her bread.

Among the fields she breathed again:
The master-current of her brain
Ran permanent and free;

And, coming to the banks of Tone,
There did she rest; and dwell alone
Under the greenwood tree.

The engines of her pain, the tools
That shaped her sorrow, rocks and pools,
And airs that gently stir
The vernal leaves — she loved them still,
Nor ever tax'd them with the ill
Which had been done to her.

A barn her Winter bed supplies;
But, till the warmth of Summer skies
And Summer days is gone,
(And all do in this tale agree)
She sleeps beneath the greenwood tree,
And other home has none.

An innocent life, yet far astray!
And Ruth will, long before her day,
Be broken down and old.
Sore aches she needs must have! but less
Of mind, than body's wretchedness,
From damp, and rain, and cold.

If she is prest by want of food
She from her dwelling in the wood
Repairs to a road-side;
And there she begs at one steep place,
Where up and down with easy pace
The horsemen-travellers ride.

That oaten pipe of hers is mute
Or thrown away: but with a flute
Her loneliness she cheers;
This flute, made of a hemlock stalk,
At evening in his homeward walk
The Quantock woodman hears.

I, too, have pass'd her on the hills
Setting her little water-mills
By spouts and fountains wild —
Such small machinery as she turn'd
Ere she had wept, ere she had mourn'd, —
A young and happy child!

Farewell! and when thy days are told,
Ill-fated Ruth! in hallow'd mould
Thy corpse shall buried be;
For thee a funeral bell shall ring,
And all the congregation sing
A Christian psalm for thee.

XXXVI

Nature and the Poet

Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont

I was thy neighbour once, thou rugged Pile!
Four summer weeks I dwelt in sight of thee:
I saw thee every day; and all the while
Thy Form was sleeping on a glassy sea.

So pure the sky, so quiet was the air!
So like, so very like, was day to day!
Whene'er I look'd, thy image still was there;
It trembled, but it never pass'd away.

How perfect was the calm! It seem'd no sleep,
No mood, which season takes away, or brings:
I could have fancied that the mighty Deep
Was even the gentlest of all gentle things.

Ah! then — if mine had been the painter's hand
To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream, —

I would have planted thee, thou hoary pile,
Amid a world how different from this!
Beside a sea that could not cease to smile;
On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss.

Thou shouldst have seem'd a treasure-house divine
Of peaceful years; a chronicle of heaven; —
Of all the sunbeams that did ever shine
The very sweetest had to thee been given.

A picture had it been of lasting ease,
Elysian quiet, without toil or strife;
No motion but the moving tide; a breeze;
Or merely silent Nature's breathing life.

Such, in the fond illusion of my heart,
Such picture would I at that time have made;

And seen the soul of truth in every part,
A steadfast peace that might not be betray'd.

So once it would have been, — 'tis so no more;
I have submitted to a new control:
A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
A deep distress hath humanized my soul.

Not for a moment could I now behold
A smiling sea, and be what I have been:
The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old;
This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.

Then, Beaumont, Friend! who would have been the friend
If he had lived, of Him whom I deplore,
This work of thine I blame not, but commend;
This sea in anger, and that dismal shore.

O 'tis a passionate work! — yet wise and well,
Well chosen is the spirit that is here;
That hulk which labours in the deadly swell,
This rueful sky, this pageantry of fear!

And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
— Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time —
The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.

— Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind![1]

[1] Mankind.

Such happiness, wherever it be known,
Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here:—
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

XXXVII

Glen-Almain, the Narrow Glen

In this still place, remote from men,
Sleeps Ossian, in the Narrow Glen;
In this still place, where murmurs on
But one meek streamlet, only one:
He sang of battles, and the breath
Of stormy war, and violent death;
And should, methinks, when all was past,
Have rightfully been laid at last
Where rocks were rudely heap'd, and rent
As by a spirit turbulent;
Where sights were rough, and sounds were wild,
And everything unreconciled;
In some complaining, dim retreat,
For fear and melancholy meet;
But this is calm; there cannot be
A more entire tranquillity.
Does then the Bard sleep here indeed?
Or is it but a groundless creed?
What matters it? — I blame them not
Whose fancy in this lonely spot

Was moved ; and in such way express'd
Their notion of its perfect rest.
A convent, even a hermit's cell,
Would break the silence of this Dell :
It is not quiet, is not ease ;
But something deeper far than these :
The separation that is here
Is of the grave ; and of austere
Yet happy feelings of the dead :
And, therefore, was it rightly said
That Ossian, last of all his race !
Lies buried in this lonely place.

XXXVIII

The World is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers ;
Little we see in Nature that is ours ;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
The winds that will be howling at all hours
And are up-gather'd now like sleeping flowers,
For this, for every thing, we are out of tune ;

It moves us not. — Great God ! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn, —
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathéd horn.

XXXIX

Within King's College Chapel, Cambridge

Tax not the royal Saint[1] with vain expense,
With ill-match'd aims the Architect who plann'd
(Albeit labouring for a scanty band
Of white-robed Scholars only) this immense

And glorious work of fine intelligence!
— Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more: —
So deem'd the man who fashion'd for the sense

These lofty pillars, spread that branching roof
Self-poised, and scoop'd into ten thousand cells
Where light and shade repose, where music dwells

Lingering — and wandering on as loth to die;
Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality.

XL

The Two April Mornings

We walk'd along, while bright and red
Uprose the morning sun;
And Matthew stopp'd, he look'd, and said
'The will of God be done!'

[1] Henry VI.

A village schoolmaster was he,
With hair of glittering grey;
As blithe a man as you could see
On a spring holiday.

And on that morning, through the grass
And by the steaming rills
We travell'd merrily, to pass
A day among the hills.

'Our work,' said I, 'was well begun;
Then, from thy breast what thought,
Beneath so beautiful a sun,
So sad a sigh has brought?'

A second time did Matthew stop;
And fixing still his eye
Upon the eastern mountain-top,
To me he made reply:

'Yon cloud with that long purple cleft
Brings fresh into my mind
A day like this, which I have left
Full thirty years behind.

'And just above yon slope of corn
Such colours, and no other,
Were in the sky that April morn,
Of this the very brother.

'With rod and line I sued the sport
Which that sweet season gave,

And to the church-yard come, stopp'd short
Beside my daughter's grave.

'Nine summers had she scarcely seen,
The pride of all the vale;
And then she sang, — she would have been
A very nightingale.

'Six feet in earth my Emma lay;
And yet I loved her more —
For so it seem'd, — than till that day
I e'er had loved before.

'And turning from her grave, I met,
Beside the churchyard yew,
A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet
With points of morning dew.

'A basket on her head she bare;
Her brow was smooth and white:
To see a child so very fair,
It was a pure delight!

'No fountain from its rocky cave
E'er tripp'd with foot so free;
She seem'd as happy as a wave
That dances on the sea.

'There came from me a sigh of pain
Which I could ill confine;
I look'd at her, and look'd again:
And did not wish her mine!'

— Matthew is in his grave, yet now
Methinks I see him stand
As at that moment, with a bough
Of wilding in his hand.

XLI

The Fountain

A Conversation

We talk'd with open heart, and tongue
Affectionate and true,
A pair of friends, though I was young,
And Matthew seventy-two.

We lay beneath a spreading oak,
Beside a mossy seat;
And from the turf a fountain broke
And gurgled at our feet.

'Now, Matthew!' said I, 'let us match
This water's pleasant tune
With some old border-song, or catch[1]
That suits a summer's noon;

'Or of the church-clock and the chimes
Sing here beneath the shade
That half-mad thing of witty rhymes
Which you last April made!'

[1] A merry song.

In silence Matthew lay, and eyed
The spring beneath the tree;
And thus the dear old man replied,
The grey-hair'd man of glee:

'No check, no stay, this Streamlet fears,
How merrily it goes!
'Twill murmur on a thousand years
And flow as now it flows.

'And here, on this delightful day,
I cannot choose but think
How oft, a vigorous man, I lay
Beside this fountain's brink.

'My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirr'd,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard.

'Thus fares it still in our decay:
And yet the wiser mind
Mourns less for what Age takes away,
Than what it leaves behind.

'The blackbird amid leafy trees,
The lark above the hill,
Let loose their carols when they please,
Are quiet when they will.

'With Nature never do they wage
A foolish strife; they see

A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free:

'But we are press'd by heavy laws;
And often, glad no more,
We wear a face of joy, because
We have been glad of yore.

'If there be one who need bemoan
His kindred laid in earth,
The household hearts that were his own,—
It is the man of mirth.

'My days, my friend, are almost gone,
My life has been approved,
And many love me; but by none
Am I enough beloved.'

'Now both himself and me he wrongs,
The man who thus complains!
I live and sing my idle songs
Upon these happy plains:

'And Matthew, for thy children dead
I'll be a son to thee!'
At this he grasp'd my hand and said,
'Alas! that cannot be.'

—We rose up from the fountain-side;
And down the smooth descent
Of the green sheep-track did we glide;
And through the wood we went;

And ere we came to Leonard's rock
He sang those witty rhymes
About the crazy old church-clock,
And the bewilder'd chimes.

XLII

The Trosachs

There's not a nook within this solemn Pass,
But were an apt confessional for One
Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
That Life is but a tale of morning grass

Wither'd at eve. From scenes of art which chase
That thought away, turn, and with watchful eyes
Feed it 'mid Nature's old felicities,
Rocks, rivers, and smooth lakes more clear than glass

Untouch'd, unbreathed upon: — Thrice happy quest,
If from a golden perch of aspen spray
(October's workmanship to rival May),

The pensive warbler of the ruddy breast
That moral sweeten by a heaven-taught lay,
Lulling the year, with all its cares, to rest!

XLIII

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,

So be it when I shall grow old
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man:
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

XLIV

Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the rose;
The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong.
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;—
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong:
I hear the echoes through the mountains throng,
The winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay;
Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every beast keep holiday;—
Thou child of joy
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy
Shepherd-boy!

Ye blesséd Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,[1]
The fulness of your bliss, I feel — I feel it all.
Oh evil day! If I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning
This sweet May-morning;
And the children are culling

[1] Crown.

On every side
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm
And the babe leaps up on his mother's arm: —
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
— But there's a tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have look'd upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;

At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind
And no unworthy aim,
The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her inmate, Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learnéd art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little actor cons another part;

Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity;
Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal Mind, —
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,

That Nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest,
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast: —
— Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprized:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor man nor boy
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!

Hence, in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither;
Can in a moment travel thither —
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then, sing ye birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!
We, in thought, will join your throng
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forbode not any severing of our loves!

Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquish'd one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway:
I love the brooks which down their channels fret
Even more than when I tripp'd lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born day
Is lovely yet;
The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

I. Life

Byron, Shelley, and Keats, whose names are joined as often as any three in English letters, were — with all their differences — alike in one sad respect. You cannot read their biographies without feeling a pity and a wonder that such rare genius should be given to the world so briefly. Too soon, with all three, the shears of the blind Fury slit the thin-spun life.

Of the truly great English poets, Byron and Shelley stand almost alone as men of high birth. Though not of the nobility, Percy Bysshe Shelley came of a family both rich and ancient. His father, Timothy Shelley (afterward Sir Timothy), had married the very beautiful Elizabeth Pilfold. Of their four daughters and two sons, the eldest was the poet, who was born August 4, 1792, at Field Place, near Horsham, Sussex. He might have been a changeling; for never before or since did such conventional, worldly people rear a child so unworldly and so ethereal. Lord Chesterfield, with no greater surprise, might have found himself father to Ariel.

Shelley passed his boyhood at Field Place, where, his sister Hellen has told us, he "would frequently come into the nursery, and was full of a peculiar kind

of pranks. One piece of mischief, for which he was rebuked, was running a stick through the ceiling of a low passage to find some new chamber, which could be made effective for some new flights of imagination." His sister has also left a picture of him as a slight and beautiful figure, with eyes of a "wild fixed beauty," skin like snow, and bright ringlets covering his head; and tells how, while playing at ghosts and alchemists, the children all dressed themselves "in strange costumes to personate spirits or fiends, and Bysshe would take a fire-stove and fill it with some inflammable liquid and carry it flaming into the kitchen and to the back door." The boy was also friends with an "Old Snake" who had lived for several generations in the garden.

When ten years old, he was sent away to school, at Sion House, Brentford. Here, while dreaming out at the windows, or wandering in a revery, he absorbed the classic languages as if without an effort. On holidays, when the other boys went to their games, his slight and delicate figure might be seen pacing back and forth under the playground walls, in deep and vague meditation. In 1804 he left Sion House for Eton, where again he was not popular, though he won admiration from the younger boys, of his own age, by leading a rebellion against the custom of fagging. This last, you might guess, is exactly what Shelley would do; for his whole life was a protest against all established customs which had any trace of oppression or tyranny. His schoolmates elected him "The Atheist,"—a title which, his friend Hogg says, was given to the boy who

defied the rules most openly. In studies he was not idle, but irregular, reading Greek and Latin with astonishing swiftness, dabbling with crucibles, microscopes, and Leyden jars, and going about, even on holidays at home, with hands and clothes "constantly stained and corroded by acids." Science fascinated him, but he did not really study so much as play at it, like any boy who has read about magicians and alchemists.

He also wrote a wild and foolish novel called *Zastrozzi*, which strangely enough got itself published in 1810, and which brought him in £40. He spent the money, or part of it, on a farewell supper with eight other school-boys, and left Eton for Oxford. Hogg, his college friend and biographer, describes him as a freshman, and their life as undergraduates. "He was tall, but he stooped so much that he seemed of a low stature. His clothes were expensive, and made according to the most approved mode, . . . but they were tumbled, rumpled, unbrushed. His gestures were abrupt, and sometimes violent, . . . yet more frequently gentle and graceful. His complexion was . . . almost feminine, of the purest red and white. . . . His features . . . and particularly his head, were . . . unusually small; yet the last *appeared* of a remarkable bulk, for his hair was long and bushy, and . . . in the agonies . . . of anxious thought, he often rubbed it fiercely with his hands . . . so that it was singularly wild and rough. . . . His features . . . breathed an animation, a fire, an enthusiasm, a vivid

and preternatural intelligence, that I never met with in any other countenance." His voice "was excruciating; it was intolerably shrill, harsh, and discordant." Like Byron, Shelley was a good shot, and carried and fired pistols everywhere, so recklessly as to be a danger both to others and to himself. His rooms were a wild confusion of chemical and electrical apparatus, jumbled with half-finished manuscripts, perilous acids, and costly books. He read, says Hogg, sixteen hours out of the twenty-four; walked, ate, and talked with his friend; and at six in the evening, "even in the midst of a most animated narrative," would stretch out on the rug, with his "little round head" fairly in the fire, and so lie, "in a sweet and mighty oblivion, until ten, when he would suddenly start up, and rubbing his eyes with great violence, and passing his fingers swiftly through his long hair, would . . . begin to recite verses, either . . . his own . . . or from the works of others, with a rapidity and an energy that were often quite painful."

Whatever this undergraduate career might have led to, it was cut short on March 25, 1811. Always eager to speculate and argue on philosophy and religion, Shelley had published a two-page pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. Its spirit seems to have been callow rather than wicked; but the Fellows of the college pounced upon it, and expelled its author. With Hogg — who stood by him and was also expelled — Shelley left Oxford, and took the coach for London. His father had forbidden him to return home, his supply of money was scant, and he was forced to give up all hope

of marrying the cousin, Harriet Grove, to whom he had once been virtually engaged.

With these prospects, Shelley took a characteristic step. We must be fair, by the way, to his father, who tried to be reconciled and proposed compromises. Shelley would not listen. For all compromise he had an inborn, fiery hatred. This is the single and lame excuse for the contempt with which he treated his father; this, and the twist which genius gives a man, the fact that a young and unbounded imagination could not understand the ties of common life. At all events, with such a twist and with such prospects, Shelley now determined to marry. Harriet Westbrook, a pink and white girl of sixteen, listened to his doctrines of free thought, and persuaded him that she was ill-treated both at home and at school. The plea of tyranny was enough for the poet; they eloped in a hackney coach that autumn, and were married in Edinburgh. Their married life is difficult to trace. It began happily in Scotland, continued through many rapid flittings from house to house and city to city, and — after they had tried to stir up a revolution in Ireland, by throwing copies of an *Address to the Irish People* to men who passed beneath their balcony in Dublin — it ended by a separation in July, 1814. Meantime (1813), Shelley had published *Queen Mab*, an immature poem which confirmed the public in thinking him a dangerous infidel. And when, a fortnight after separating from his wife, he departed for the Continent with Mary Godwin, he became, like Byron, a sort of English monster.

Of his great lyric powers he had yet given no sign. It was only after his wanderings in France, Switzerland, and England, after the tragic death of his first wife Harriet and his marriage to Mary Godwin in 1816, that he settled in Italy, and with the shadow of death over him, began those four wonderful years of song. The list of his important works is very short. To *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, and to *Laon and Cythna* — published in 1817, reissued next year as *The Revolt of Islam* — he now added, in 1819, *The Cenci*, and in 1820, *Prometheus Unbound;* in 1821, *Epipsychidion* and his lament for the death of Keats, *Adonais;* and in 1822, *Hellas*. His best lyrics were written in this period, while he lived at Naples, Leghorn, or Pisa, a constant companion of Lord Byron, and like him, exiled as an enemy to society. He had friends and visitors, however, besides Byron, — his cousin Captain Medwin, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, the Greek prince and revolutionist Mavrocordatos, Leigh Hunt, and the Cornish rover and free-lance, Captain Trelawny.

It is Trelawny who has told us how Shelley passed his days. "[He] was up at six or seven, reading Plato, Sophocles, or Spinoza, with the accompaniment of a hunch of dry bread; then he joined Williams in a sail on the Arno, in a flat-bottomed skiff, book in hand, and from thence he went to the pine-forest, or some out-of-the-way place. When the birds went to roost, he returned home, and talked and read until midnight." Once Trelawny, after hunting for Shelley all day in the pine forest near Pisa, was guided by an old *con-*

tadino to his retreat. "As we advanced, the ground swelled into mounds and hollows. By-and-by the old fellow pointed with his stick to a hat, books, and loose papers lying about, and then to a deep pool of dark glimmering water, saying 'Eccolo!' I thought he meant that Shelley was in or under the water. The careless, not to say impatient, way in which the Poet bore his burden of life, caused a vague dread amongst his family and friends that he might lose or cast it away at any moment.

"The strong light streamed through the opening of the trees. One of the pines, undermined by the water, had fallen into it. Under its lea, and nearly hidden, sat the Poet, gazing on the dark mirror beneath, so lost in his bardish revery that he did not hear my approach. There the trees were stunted and bent, and their crowns were shorn like friars by the sea breezes, excepting a cluster of three, under which Shelley's traps were lying; these overtopped the rest. To avoid startling the Poet out of his dream, I squatted under the lofty trees, and opened his books. One was a volume of his favourite Greek dramatist, Sophocles — the same that I found in his pocket after death — and the other was a volume of Shakespeare." The dreamer had been writing the lyric *Ariel to Miranda: — Take, etc.* "It was a frightful scrawl; words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers and all run together 'in most admired disorder'; it might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks.

. . . On my observing this to him, he answered, 'When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off.'"

In these last days of wonderful activity, his fate appears to gather thickly over Shelley, as over Shakespeare's Brutus. Both he and his friends talked much of death, saw visions, felt premonitions. Twice it seemed to the poet that Allegra, Byron's dead child, rose laughing from the sea to beckon him. At midnight the vision of a cloaked figure stood at his bedside, summoned him to follow to another room, and there, unshrouding its cloak, revealed to the terrified beholder his own features. Among such visions he continued to write his last poem, *The Triumph of Life*. The fragment remains broken at the words: "Then what is Life? I cried —"

He was soon to find the answer. On July 8, 1822, he and Edward Williams, with a sailor boy named Charles Vivian, set sail from Leghorn for Lerici, in their yacht, the *Don Juan*. Captain Trelawny, aboard Byron's *Bolivar* in the harbour, watching them start, heard his Genoese mate grumble — "the devil is brewing mischief." The departing sail was lost in a fog. A short but violent storm broke soon after. For ten days Trelawny patrolled with the coast-guardsmen, before Shelley's body was found on the sand near Via Reggio. In one pocket was "the volume of Sophocles . . . and Keats's poems in the other, doubled back, as if the reader, in the act of reading, had hastily thrust it away."

Only the poet's ashes could be taken to Rome for burial. A funeral pyre was therefore necessary. Captain Trelawny, eye-witness to many strange happenings, saw none stranger than the last rites. "Byron and Leigh Hunt arrived in the carriage, attended by soldiers, and the Health Officer. . . . The lonely and grand scenery that surrounded us, so exactly harmonized with Shelley's genius, that I could imagine his spirit soaring over us. The sea, with the islands of Gorgona, Capraja, and Elba, was before us; old battlemented watch-towers stretched along the coast, backed by the marble-crested Apennines glistening in the sun. . . . The work went on silently . . . not a word was spoken, for the Italians have a touch of sentiment, and their feelings are easily excited into sympathy. Byron was silent and thoughtful. . . . After the fire was well kindled . . . more wine was poured over Shelley's dead body than he had consumed during his life. This with the oil and salt made the yellow flames glisten and quiver. The heat from the sun and fire was so intense that the atmosphere was tremulous and wavy. . . . The fire was so fierce as to produce a white heat on the iron, and to reduce its contents to grey ashes. . . . but what surprised us all was that the heart remained entire. In snatching this relic from the fiery furnace, my hand was severely burnt."

Shelley's heart was carried to England; his ashes were taken to Rome, where they lie in the Protestant cemetery, near his son William and his friend Keats. Leigh Hunt wrote the epitaph:—

"PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
COR CORDIUM
Natus iv. Aug. MDCCXCII.
Obiit viii. Jul. MDCCCXXII."

To this Trelawny added the lines sung by another Ariel in another *Tempest*:—

"Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

II. Poems

If you had lived a hundred years ago, you would probably have heard of Shelley's poems as the work of a dangerous and wicked young man who proclaimed theories destructive to the church, the state, and the home. If, however, you were to read of those poems only the selections in the present book, you would be left wondering how their author could possibly have earned so bad a name. You will find, in reading them, nothing violent or incendiary, no signs of the "Necessity of Atheism," no fiery impatience for the millennium, no ardent and eloquent struggle —

". . . to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe."

Indeed, you will not find Shelley speaking as a revolutionist at all, except in the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, where he prophesied the downfall of Venice, with her —

". . . conquest-branded brow
Stooping to the slave of slaves."

Except for this hint, and one or two even less direct, you might not guess that the clear spirit of this singer was ever troubled by the rebellious doctrine of William Godwin.

Indeed, there is no strong reason why you should learn to know Shelley as a revolutionary poet. Later some of you may read, perhaps, those other poems which, like *The Revolt of Islam*, *Hellas*, or *Prometheus Unbound*, show what violent sympathy he felt with revolutions both real and imagined, and with what high hopes he looked forward to a bloodless victory over the established order of his day, and to a new and early brotherhood of man. For the present, however, the few short pieces in this book will disclose to you all, or nearly all, the other great leading motives of the poet, the beauties of his verse, and the quality of his genius.

A solitary man, and none other, must have written such lines as —

> "Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
> Nor peace within nor calm around; . . .
> Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
> Others I see whom these surround —
> Smiling they live, and call life pleasure; —
> To me that cup has been dealt in another measure."

When he sits beside "the deep's untrampled floor, . . . upon the sands alone," he utters his most poignant thought in the exclamation —

> "How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion."

And to this brooding sense of loneliness is added the discontent of a young man who has a grievance against the world, who finds nothing "the world contains in which he could approve." Discontent and longing mingle with his moments of keenest joy. It is not that he misses any human companion, or longs for some absent person, like Wordsworth when he wrote —

> "Surprised by joy, impatient as the Wind,
> I turned to share the transport — Oh! with whom
> But Thee, deep buried in the silent tomb;"

for with Shelley, the beloved absent being is a vague Unknown. When he brings his tribute of "visionary flowers," it is to no one on earth: —

> "... elate and gay,
> I hastened to the spot whence I had come,
> That I might there present it — oh! to whom?"

The question remains unanswered. But it is the question, plainly, of an idealist. When you are older, you will find that this Unknown was the ideal of Intellectual Beauty, which Shelley pursued through all his short life and his long art.

Beauty, to Wordsworth, lay all about and close at hand in the meanest objects of common life, when those objects were seized upon and contemplated in the light of the poet's emotion. To Shelley (though perhaps he learned some part of that truth from the Cumbrian poet) beauty lay at the end of a quest, in some region as far off as the No Man's Land to which Alastor travelled. This being so, you will understand why Shelley, who

could and sometimes did describe outdoor things in terms concrete and vivid, brings before your inward eye fewer actual scenes of natural beauty than his companion poets. His Italian landscapes are likely to be real landscapes; but England does not produce such vales of "musk-rose twined with jasmine," such stormy crags or "ghastly torrents" or primeval cedars, as Shelley used for background; and even in Italy he sees less beauty of earth than of light and air. The humbler living things are absent: no green linnet flits among its brother leaves, no poor Wat, the hare, doubles through the thickets of Shelley's wood; so that when, in the fourth stanza of *The Recollection*, you hear the woodpecker disturbing the silence of the trees, you greet with surprise a sound so unexpectedly familiar. The living creatures in Shelley are almost always birds; and those birds, whether the grey shades of Euganean rooks soaring in dewy mists, or the skylark lost "in the golden lightning of the sunken sun," are tiny points of animate life, high above him, nearly disembodied and dissolved in light and space.

Light and space, indeed, are Shelley's own domain. For this dreamy, isolated spirit, so quick and volatile that he has often been likened to Ariel, no grosser elements would serve than air and water. Shelley is not a narrative poet, for the reason that no story could find a foothold in his airy medium. Events, even the greatest events, he recounts as happening at a vast distance, and, as it were, in the sky. Were he to sing the battle of the giants and the gods, it would become a colossal but invisible warfare somewhere at the back of

the rainbow or the sunset. On the other hand, the fascination which ethereal heights and lights exerted on him is the source of his most beautiful and magical effects. Where has aspiration been given greater depth and distance than in his line "The desire of the moth for the star"? And as for the description of sights in Nature, no poet has left more lasting pictures of lights, calm or stormy, seen in the heavens, in pools, or upon the sea. His waves are —

> "Light dissolved in star-showers thrown."

In the woods he invites us —

> "To the pools where winter rains
> Image all their roof of leaves" —

or to where —

> "Sweet views which in our world above
> Can never well be seen,
> Were imaged in the water's love
> Of that fair forest green;
> And all was interfused beneath
> With an Elysian glow,
> An atmosphere without a breath,
> A softer day below.
> Like one beloved, the scene had lent
> To the dark water's breast
> Its every leaf and lineament
> With more than truth exprest."

Before a tempest, he makes us see —

> "Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
> Of some fierce Mænad, ev'n from the dim verge
> Of the horizon to the Zenith's height —
> The locks of the approaching storm."

And to that wonderful catalogue of flowers — which in a less subtle poet had been still life — Shelley gives an unearthly, tremulous beauty, as with his —

> ". . . floating water-lilies, broad and bright,
> Which lit the oak that overhung the hedge
> With moonlight beams of their own watery light."

Blossoms, indeed, he often thus describes as luminous, like those of "the moonlight-coloured May." His sky-lark, which soars and sings forever in English poetry, is likened to a cloud of fire, to a star dissolved in the broad daylight, to a glow-worm shining in dewy grass, and to the bright drops from rainbow clouds. He changes all objects into something rich and strange, not of the sea, but of the sky; and so radiant is the sky, in his best and highest moments, that like his lark he becomes —

> ". . . a poet hidden
> In the light of thought."

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I

The Indian Serenade

I arise from dreams of Thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low
And the stars are shining bright:
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Hath led me — who knows how?
To thy chamber-window, Sweet!

The wandering airs they faint
On the dark, the silent stream —
The champak odours fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
The nightingale's complaint
It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine
O belovéd as thou art!

Oh lift me from the grass!
I die, I faint, I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.

My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast;
Oh! press it close to thine again
Where it will break at last.

II

I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden;
Thou needest not fear mine;
My spirit is too deeply laden
Ever to burthen thine.

I fear thy mien, thy tones, thy motion;
Thou needest not fear mine;
Innocent is the heart's devotion
With which I worship thine.

III

Love's Philosophy

The fountains mingle with the river
And the rivers with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix for ever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single,
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle —
Why not I with thine?

See the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdain'd its brother:

And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea —
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?

IV

To The Night

Swiftly walk over the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave
Where, all the long and lone daylight,
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear
Which make thee terrible and dear, —
Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle grey
Star-inwrought;
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day,
Kiss her until she be wearied out:
Then wander o'er city and sea and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand —
Come, long-sought!

When I arose and saw the dawn,
I sigh'd for thee;
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
And the weary Day turn'd to his rest
Lingering like an unloved guest,
I sigh'd for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried
Wouldst thou me?
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
Murmur'd like a noon-tide bee
Shall I nestle near thy side?
Wouldst thou me? — And I replied
No, not thee!

Death will come when thou art dead,
Soon, too soon —
Sleep will come when thou art fled;
Of neither would I ask the boon
I ask of thee, belovéd Night —
Swift be thine approaching flight,
Come soon, soon!

V

The Flight of Love

When the lamp is shatter'd
The light in the dust lies dead —
When the cloud is scatter'd,
The rainbow's glory is shed.
When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remember'd not;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.

As music and splendour
Survive not the lamp and the lute,

The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute —
No song but sad dirges,
Like the wind through a ruin'd cell,
Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.

When hearts have once mingled,
Love first leaves the well-built nest;
The weak one is singled
To endure what it once possesst.
O Love! who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier?

Its passions will rock thee
As the storms rock the ravens on high;
Bright reason will mock thee
Like the sun from a wintry sky.
From thy nest every rafter
Will rot, and thine eagle home
Leave thee naked to laughter,
When leaves fall and cold winds come.

VI

One word is too often profaned
  For me to profane it,
One feeling too falsely disdain'd
  For thee to disdain it.

One hope is too like despair
For prudence to smother,
And pity from thee more dear
Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love;
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not:
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

VII

Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,
The waves are dancing fast and bright,
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear
The purple noon's transparent might:
The breath of the moist earth is light
Around its unexpanded buds;
Like many a voice of one delight —
The winds', the birds', the ocean-floods' —
The city's voice itself is soft like Solitude's.

I see the deep's untrampled floor
With green and purple sea-weeds strown;
I see the waves upon the shore
Like light dissolved in star-showers thrown:

I sit upon the sands alone;
The lightning of the noon-tide ocean
Is flashing round me, and a tone
Arises from its measured motion —
How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion.

Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
Nor peace within nor calm around,
Nor that content, surpassing wealth,
The sage in meditation found,
And walk'd with inward glory crown'd —
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure;
Others I see whom these surround —
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.

Yet now despair itself is mild
Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne, and yet must bear, —
Till death like sleep might steal on me,
And I might feel in the warm air
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

VIII

To a Skylark

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it

Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire,
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun
O'er which clouds are brightening,
Thou dost float and run,
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of heaven
In the broad daylight
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight:

Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflow'd.

What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody;—

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aerial hue
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:

Like a rose embower'd
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflower'd,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-wingéd thieves.

Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awaken'd flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.

Teach us, sprite or bird,
What sweet thoughts are thine:
I have never heard
Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

Chorus hymeneal
Or triumphal chaunt
Match'd with thine, would be all
But an empty vaunt —
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

What objects are the fountains
Of thy happy strain?
What fields, or waves, or mountains?
What shapes of sky or plain?
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest; but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

Waking or asleep
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now!

IX

Ozymandias of Egypt

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

X

To a Lady, with a Guitar

Ariel to Miranda: — Take
This slave of music, for the sake
Of him, who is the slave of thee;
And teach it all the harmony
In which thou canst, and only thou,
Make the delighted spirit glow,
Till joy denies itself again
And, too intense, is turn'd to pain.

For by permission and command
Of thine own Prince Ferdinand,
Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken;
Your guardian spirit, Ariel, who
From life to life must still pursue
Your happiness, for thus alone
Can Ariel ever find his own,
From Prospero's enchanted cell,
As the mighty verses tell,
To the throne of Naples he
Lit you o'er the trackless sea,
Flitting on, your prow before,
Like a living meteor.
When you die, the silent Moon
In her interlunar swoon
Is not sadder in her cell
Than deserted Ariel: —
When you live again on earth,
Like an unseen Star of birth
Ariel guides you o'er the sea
Of life from your nativity: —
Many changes have been run
Since Ferdinand and you begun
Your course of love, and Ariel still
Has track'd your steps and served your will.
Now in humbler, happier lot,
This is all remember'd not;
And now, alas! the poor Sprite is
Imprison'd for some fault of his

In a body like a grave —
From you he only dares to crave,
For his service and his sorrow
A smile to-day, a song to-morrow.

The artist who this idol wrought
To echo all harmonious thought,
Fell'd a tree, while on the steep
The woods were in their winter sleep,
Rock'd in that repose divine
On the wind-swept Apennine;
And dreaming, some of Autumn past,
And some of Spring approaching fast,
And some of April buds and showers,
And some of songs in July bowers,
And all of love: And so this tree, —
Oh that such our death may be! —
Died in sleep, and felt no pain,
To live in happier form again:
From which, beneath heaven's fairest star,
The artist wrought this loved Guitar;
And taught it justly to reply
To all who question skilfully
In language gentle as thine own;
Whispering in enamour'd tone
Sweet oracles of woods and dells,
And summer winds in sylvan cells:
— For it had learnt all harmonies
Of the plains and of the skies,
Of the forests and the mountains,

And the many-voicéd fountains;
The clearest echoes of the hills,
The softest notes of falling rills,
The melodies of birds and bees,
The murmuring of summer seas,
And pattering rain, and breathing dew,
And airs of evening; and it knew
That seldom-heard mysterious sound
Which, driven on its diurnal round,
As it floats through boundless day,
Our world enkindles on its way:
— All this it knows, but will not tell
To those who cannot question well
The Spirit that inhabits it;
It talks according to the wit
Of its companions; and no more
Is heard than has been felt before
By those who tempt it to betray
These secrets of an elder day.
But, sweetly as its answers will
Flatter hands of perfect skill,
It keeps its highest holiest tone
For our beloved Friend alone.

XI

The Invitation

Best and brightest, come away, —
Fairer far than this fair Day,

Which, like thee, to those in sorrow
Comes to bid a sweet good-morrow
To the rough year just awake
In its cradle on the brake.
The brightest hour of unborn Spring
Through the winter wandering,
Found, it seems, the halcyon morn
To hoar February born;
Bending from heaven, in azure mirth,
It kiss'd the forehead of the earth,
And smiled upon the silent sea,
And bade the frozen streams be free,
And waked to music all their fountains,
And breathed upon the frozen mountains,
And like a prophetess of May
Strew'd flowers upon the barren way,
Making the wintry world appear
Like one on whom thou smilest, dear.

Away, away, from men and towns,
To the wild wood and the downs —
To the silent wilderness
Where the soul need not repress
Its music, lest it should not find
An echo in another's mind,
While the touch of Nature's art
Harmonizes heart to heart.

Radiant Sister of the Day
Awake! arise! and come away!

To the wild woods and the plains,
To the pools where winter rains
Image all their roof of leaves,
Where the pine its garland weaves
Of sapless green, and ivy dun,
Round stems that never kiss the sun;
Where the lawns and pastures be
And the sandhills of the sea;
Where the melting hoar-frost wets
The daisy-star that never sets,
And wind-flowers and violets
Which yet join not scent to hue
Crown the pale year weak and new;
When the night is left behind
In the deep east, dim and blind,
And the blue noon is over us,
And the multitudinous
Billows murmur at our feet,
Where the earth and ocean meet,
And all things seem only one
In the universal Sun.

XII

The Recollection

Now the last day of many days
All beautiful and bright as thou,
The loveliest and the last, is dead:
Rise, Memory, and write its praise!
Up — to thy wonted work! come, trace

The epitaph of glory fled,
For now the earth has changed its face,
A frown is on the heaven's brow.

We wander'd to the Pine Forest
That skirts the Ocean's foam;
The lightest wind was in its nest,
The tempest in its home.
The whispering waves were half asleep,
The clouds were gone to play,
And on the bosom of the deep
The smile of heaven lay;
It seem'd as if the hour were one
Sent from beyond the skies
Which scatter'd from above the sun
A light of Paradise!

We paused amid the pines that stood
The giants of the waste,
Tortured by storms to shapes as rude
As serpents interlaced,—
And soothed by every azure breath
That under heaven is blown,
To harmonies and hues beneath,
As tender as its own:
Now all the tree-tops lay asleep
Like green waves on the sea,
As still as in the silent deep
The ocean-woods may be.

How calm it was!—The silence there
By such a chain was bound,

That even the busy woodpecker
  Made stiller with her sound
The inviolable quietness;
  The breath of peace we drew
With its soft motion made not less
  The calm that round us grew.
There seem'd, from the remotest seat
  Of the white mountain waste
To the soft flower beneath our feet,
  A magic circle traced, —
A spirit interfused around,
  A thrilling silent life;
To momentary peace it bound
  Our mortal nature's strife; —
And still I felt the centre of
  The magic circle there
Was one fair form that fill'd with love
  The lifeless atmosphere.

We paused beside the pools that lie
  Under the forest bough;
Each seem'd as 'twere a little sky
  Gulf'd in a world below;
A firmament of purple light
  Which in the dark earth lay,
More boundless than the depth of night
  And purer than the day —
In which the lovely forests grew
  As in the upper air,
More perfect both in shape and hue

Than any spreading there.
There lay the glade and neighbouring lawn,
And through the dark-green wood
The white sun twinkling like the dawn
Out of a speckled cloud.
Sweet views which in our world above
Can never well be seen
Were imaged in the water's love
Of that fair forest green:
And all was interfused beneath
With an Elysian glow,
An atmosphere without a breath,
A softer day below.
Like one beloved, the scene had lent
To the dark water's breast
Its every leaf and lineament
With more than truth exprest;
Until an envious wind crept by,
Like an unwelcome thought
Which from the mind's too faithful eye
Blots one dear image out.
— Though thou art ever fair and kind,
The forests ever green,
Less oft is peace in Shelley's mind
Than calm in waters seen!

XIII

To the Moon

Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven, and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth, —
And ever-changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy?

XIV

A Dream of the Unknown

I dream'd that as I wander'd by the way
Bare Winter suddenly was changed to Spring,
And gentle odours led my steps astray,
Mix'd with a sound of waters murmuring
Along a shelving bank of turf, which lay
Under a copse, and hardly dared to fling
Its green arms round the bosom of the stream,
But kiss'd it and then fled, as Thou mightest in dream.

There grew pied wind-flowers and violets,
Daisies, those pearl'd Arcturi of the earth,
The constellated flower that never sets;
Faint oxlips; tender blue-bells, at whose birth
The sod scarce heaved; and that tall flower that wets

Its mother's face with heaven-collected tears,
When the low wind, its playmate's voice, it hears.

And in the warm hedge grew lush eglantine,
Green cow-bind and the moonlight-colour'd May,
And cherry-blossoms, and white cups, whose wine
Was the bright dew yet drain'd not by the day;
And wild roses, and ivy serpentine
With its dark buds and leaves, wandering astray;
And flowers azure, black, and streak'd with gold,
Fairer than any waken'd eyes behold.

And nearer to the river's trembling edge
There grew broad flag-flowers, purple prank'd with white,
And starry river-buds among the sedge,
And floating water-lilies, broad and bright,
Which lit the oak that overhung the hedge
With moonlight beams of their own watery light;
And bulrushes, and reeds of such deep green
As soothed the dazzled eye with sober sheen.

Methought that of these visionary flowers
I made a nosegay, bound in such a way
That the same hues, which in their natural bowers
Were mingled or opposed, the like array
Kept these imprison'd children of the Hours
Within my hand, — and then, elate and gay,
I hasten'd to the spot whence I had come
That I might there present it — O! to Whom?

XV

Written Among The Euganean Hills

Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep wide sea of Misery,
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on
Day and night, and night and day,
Drifting on his dreary way,
With the solid darkness black
Closing round his vessel's track;
Whilst above, the sunless sky
Big with clouds, hangs heavily,
And behind the tempest fleet
Hurries on with lightning feet,
Riving sail, and cord, and plank,
Till the ship has almost drank
Death from the o'er-brimming deep;
And sinks down, down, like that sleep
When the dreamer seems to be
Weltering through eternity;
And the dim low line before
Of a dark and distant shore
Still recedes, as ever still
Longing with divided will,
But no power to seek or shun,
He is ever drifted on
O'er the unreposing wave,
To the haven of the grave.

Ah, many flowering islands lie
In the waters of wide Agony:
To such a one this morn was led
My bark, by soft winds piloted.
—'Mid the mountains Euganean
I stood listening to the paean[1]
With which the legion'd rooks did hail
The Sun's uprise majestical:
Gathering round with wings all hoar,
Through the dewy mist they soar
Like gray shades, till the eastern heaven
Bursts; and then,— as clouds of even
Fleck'd with fire and azure, lie
In the unfathomable sky,—
So their plumes of purple grain
Starr'd with drops of golden rain
Gleam above the sunlight woods,
As in silent multitudes
On the morning's fitful gale
Through the broken mist they sail;
And the vapours cloven and gleaming
Follow down the dark steep streaming,
Till all is bright, and clear, and still
Round the solitary hill.

Beneath is spread like a green sea
The waveless plain of Lombardy,
Bounded by the vaporous air,
Islanded by cities fair;

[1] Triumphal hymn.

Underneath Day's azure eyes,
Ocean's nursling, Venice lies,—
A peopled labyrinth of walls,
Amphitrite's destined halls,
Which her hoary sire now paves
With his blue and beaming waves.
Lo! the sun upsprings behind,
Broad, red, radiant, half-reclined
On the level quivering line
Of the waters crystalline;
And before that chasm of light,
As within a furnace bright,
Column, tower, and dome, and spire,
Shine like obelisks of fire,
Pointing with inconstant motion
From the altar of dark ocean
To the sapphire-tinted skies;
As the flames of sacrifice
From the marble shrines did rise
As to pierce the dome of gold
Where Apollo spoke of old.

Sun-girt City! thou hast been
Ocean's child, and then his queen;
Now is come a darker day,
And thou soon must be his prey,
If the power that raised thee here
Hallow so thy watery bier.
A less drear ruin then than now,
With thy conquest-branded brow

Stooping to the slave of slaves
From thy throne among the waves
Wilt thou be, — when the sea-mew
Flies, as once before it flew,
O'er thine isles depopulate,
And all is in its ancient state,
Save where many a palace-gate
With green sea flowers overgrown
Like a rock of ocean's own,
Topples o'er the abandon'd sea
As the tides change sullenly.
The fisher on his watery way
Wandering at the close of day,
Will spread his sail and seize his oar
Till he pass the gloomy shore,
Lest thy dead should, from their sleep,
Bursting o'er the starlight deep,
Lead a rapid masque of death
O'er the waters of his path.

Noon descends around me now:
'Tis the noon of autumn's glow,
When a soft and purple mist
Like a vaporous amethyst,
Or an air-dissolvéd star
Mingling light and fragrance, far
From the curved horizon's bound
To the point of heaven's profound,
Fills the overflowing sky;
And the plains that silent lie

Underneath; the leaves unsodden
Where the infant Frost has trodden
With his morning-wingéd feet
Whose bright print is gleaming yet;
And the red and golden vines
Piercing with their trellised lines
The rough, dark-skirted wilderness;
The dun and bladed grass no less,
Pointing from this hoary tower
In the windless air; the flower
Glimmering at my feet; the line
Of the olive-sandall'd Apennine
In the south dimly islanded;
And the Alps, whose snows are spread
High between the clouds and sun;
And of living things each one;
And my spirit, which so long
Darken'd this swift stream of song, —
Interpenetrated lie
By the glory of the sky;
Be it love, light, harmony,
Odour, or the soul of all
Which from heaven like dew doth fall,
Or the mind which feeds this verse,
Peopling the lone universe.

Noon descends, and after noon
Autumn's evening meets me soon,
Leading the infantine moon
And that one star, which to her

Almost seems to minister
Half the crimson light she brings
From the sunset's radiant springs:
And the soft dreams of the morn
(Which like wingéd winds had borne
To that silent isle, which lies
'Mid remember'd agonies,
The frail bark of this lone being),
Pass, to other sufferers fleeing,
And its ancient pilot, Pain,
Sits beside the helm again.

Other flowering isles must be
In the sea of Life and Agony:
Other spirits float and flee
O'er that gulf: Ev'n now, perhaps,
On some rock the wild wave wraps,
With folded wings they waiting sit
For my bark, to pilot it
To some calm and blooming cove;
Where for me, and those I love,
May a windless bower be built,
Far from passion, pain, and guilt,
In a dell 'mid lawny hills
Which the wild sea-murmur fills,
And soft sunshine, and the sound
Of old forests echoing round,
And the light and smell divine
Of all flowers that breathe and shine,
— We may live so happy there,

That the Spirits of the Air
Envying us, may ev'n entice
To our healing paradise
The polluting multitude:
But their rage would be subdued
By that clime divine and calm,
And the winds whose wings rain balm
On the uplifted soul, and leaves
Under which the bright sea heaves;
While each breathless interval
In their whisperings musical
The inspired soul supplies
With its own deep melodies;
And the Love which heals all strife
Circling, like the breath of life,
All things in that sweet abode
With its own mild brotherhood:—
They, not it, would change; and soon
Every sprite beneath the moon
Would repent its envy vain,
And the Earth grow young again.

XVI

Ode to the West Wind

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,

Pestilence-stricken multitudes! O thou
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The wingéd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and Preserver; Hear, oh hear!

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning! there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad, ev'n from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height —
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: Oh hear!

Thou who didst waken from his summer-dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,
All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear
And tremble and despoil themselves: Oh hear!

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than Thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be
The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision, — I would ne'er have striven
As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
One too like thee — tameless, and swift, and proud.

Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unwaken'd earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

XVII

The Poet's Dream

On a Poet's lips I slept
Dreaming like a love-adept
In the sound his breathing kept;
Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
But feeds on the aërial kisses
Of shapes that haunt Thought's wildernesses.
He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illume
The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,
  Nor heed nor see what things they be —
But from these create he can
Forms more real than living Man,
  Nurslings of Immortality!

XVIII

A Dirge

Rough wind, that moanest loud
  Grief too sad for song;
Wild wind, when sullen cloud
  Knells all the night long;
Sad storm whose tears are vain,
Bare woods whose branches stain,
Deep caves and dreary main, —
  Wail for the world's wrong!

XIX

Threnos

O World! O Life! O Time!
On whose last steps I climb,
  Trembling at that where I had stood before;
When will return the glory of your prime?
    No more — Oh, never more!

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight:
  Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
    No more — Oh, never more!

XX

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory —

Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when Thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

JOHN KEATS

I. Life

To die an Immortal, at the age of twenty-five, was the fate of John Keats. He was the eldest son of Thomas Keats, head ostler in a livery stable, who had married his employer's daughter, Elizabeth Jennings, and risen to be manager of the Swan-and-Hoop, Finsbury Pavement, London. The poet's birth at this stable, on either the 29th or the 31st of October, 1795, is of almost Biblical dignity.

His parents, who were not without means, energy, and natural gifts, had ambitions for their son. Harrow being somewhat beyond them, they sent him to a good and pleasant school kept by the Reverend John Clarke at Enfield. Soon after, in 1804, Thomas Keats, riding home at night, fell from his horse and was killed. The widow, after an unhappy second marriage and speedy separation, made a home for herself and her children at Edmonton. Here, and at the Enfield school, Keats passed a pleasant boyhood. Through the holidays he played in the brooks, caught small fishes and kept them alive in tubs, and was, as he said long afterward, very fond "of Goldfishes, Tomtits, Minnows, Mice, Ticklebacks, Dace, Cock Sal-

mons, and all the whole tribe of the Bushes and the Brooks." At school he was a leader, distinguished by his good looks, good nature, and love of battles. He fought both with and for his younger, bigger brother George, and the two joined forces to protect their frail junior, Tom. A schoolmate thus remembered the poet: "Keats was in childhood not attached to books. His *penchant* was for fighting. He would fight any one — morning, noon, and night, his brother among the rest. It was meat and drink to him. . . . His favourites were few; after they were known to fight readily he seemed to prefer them for a sort of grotesque and buffoon humour. . . . He was a boy whom any one from his extraordinary vivacity and personal beauty might easily fancy would become great — but rather in some military capacity than in literature. . . . In all active exercises he excelled." The same schoolmate, after speaking of his "daring," his "violence and vehemence . . . pugnacity and generosity . . . passions of tears or outrageous fits of laughter" — said that "associated as they were with an extraordinary beauty of person and expression, these qualities captivated the boys, and no one was more popular."

In his fourteenth year, this "favourite of all," this "pet prize-fighter" with his "terrier courage," suddenly bent all his forces to the study of books, won all the literature prizes, and of his own free will began to translate the whole *Æneid*. His lifelong friend, the master's son, Charles Cowden Clarke, recalled him as reading even at supper, "sitting back on the form from

the table, holding the folio volume of Burnet's *History of his Own Time* between himself and the table, eating his meal from beyond it." Greek mythology, the beauty of ancient fable, became his long study and deep delight.

In the winter of 1810, however, his mother died. Keats had "sat up whole nights with her in a great chair, would suffer nobody to give her medicine, or even to cook her food, but himself"; and after her death "gave way to such impassioned and prolonged grief (hiding himself in a nook under the master's desk) as awakened the liveliest pity and sympathy in all who saw him." His guardians, a merchant and a tea-dealer, soon decided that he had been long enough at school; and when he was fifteen years old, withdrawing him from Enfield, bound him as apprentice to a surgeon, a Mr. Hammond, at Edmonton. Till the autumn of 1814, Keats studied with this surgeon, drove with him, and held his horse; but a quarrel ended their relation, and the apprentice, released, went in his nineteenth year to London. He continued to study his profession, passed with credit as licentiate at Apothecaries' Hall, and on March 3, 1816, was appointed a dresser under a Mr. Lucas, surgeon at Guy's Hospital. He showed both knowledge and skill. In the arbour at Enfield, however, Cowden Clarke had opened for him not only Spenser's enchanted book, but all those western islands "that bards in fealty to Apollo hold." To Cowden Clarke, in 1815, Keats had given the two sonnets, *Written on the day that Mr. Leigh Hunt left*

Prison, and *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*. And now Keats, living with his brothers — like poor Susan's thrush, in "the vale of Cheapside" — was haunted more and more by aspirations. "The other day, during the lecture," he said, "there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray, and I was off with them to Oberon and fairyland." The falsity of the situation weighed on him, — that a poet's mind should direct a surgeon's hand. "My last operation was the opening of a man's temporal artery. I did it with the utmost nicety, but reflecting on what passed through my mind at the time, my dexterity seemed a miracle, and I never took up the lancet again." He was becoming friends with many young men of literary bent, — George Mathew, Newmarch, Reynolds, the painter Haydon, Joseph Severn, a struggling student of art, Leigh Hunt, the Liberal editor and poet, and — in the spring of 1817 — Shelley. In that same fortunate spring, Keats chose his career, and gave the world his first volume of poems.

Popularly, the book was not successful, for in the public splendour of Thomas Moore, Scott, and Byron, this newcomer was lost. Published in March, his volume had already stopped selling, when Keats, in April, settled at the Isle of Wight. Not at all disheartened, he wrote from Carisbrooke: "I find I cannot do without poetry — without eternal poetry; half the day will not do — the whole of it. . . . I had become all in a tremble from not having written anything of late. . . .

I shall forthwith begin my *Endymion*." Wandering from the Isle of Wight to Margate and to Canterbury, and afterward joining his brothers in lodgings at Hampstead, he not only worked at *Endymion*, visited Leigh Hunt in the Vale of Health, and made friends of Dilke, Charles Brown, and Bailey, but defeated in a good, stand-up fight a ruffianly young butcher who was caught tormenting a cat. For a few weeks, in the winter of 1817–18, he wrote dramatic criticisms for the *Champion*. He now began to see more of people, and to dine out, though he never cared for "fashionables," for wits "all alike," who "say things which make one start without making one feel." He was more at ease in such a company as gathered in Haydon's studio at the "immortal dinner" on December 28, 1817, where "Wordsworth's fine intonation as he quoted Milton and Virgil, Keats's eager inspired look, Lamb's quaint sparkle of lambent humour . . . speeded the conversation." In conversation, however, Keats did not shine, except fitfully. Sometimes he delighted his friends by chanting verses "in his low tremulous undertone"; sometimes made them laugh with clever but kindly mimicry; more often he stayed apart in the window-seat, listening, or with his golden-brown head sunk in thought.

In the winter of 1818 he saw much of Hunt, and something of Shelley, with both of whom he competed in writing a sonnet on the River Nile. Meantime, he was writing *Isabella*, the lines on Robin Hood, and the sonnets beginning "Chief of organic numbers"—"O

golden-tongued Romance" — and "When I have fears that I may cease to be." In the spring appeared his first great work, *Endymion*. The preface to this poem will show that Keats — like Shakespeare, "desiring this man's art and that man's scope" — had both true ambition and true modesty. "It is just," he wrote, "that this youngster (*Endymion*) should die away; a sad thought for me, if I had not some hope that while it is dwindling I may be plotting and fitting myself for verses fit to live."

When he made this brave announcement, Keats had barely three years of life before him. You have now read the story of his happy years; we shall not dwell on the unhappy. By the end of June, 1818, his brother George had married and emigrated to America; by early December, Tom Keats, the youngest and frailest of the three, was released by death, after a long suffering which the poet had outwatched with heroic tenderness. In the meantime, through July, Charles Brown had taken Keats on a walking tour through Scotland, — a fatal tour: the sombre North chilled and rebuked the poet's genius; hardship and exposure broke his health, and sowed mortal seeds. The brutal critics of *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly* — who cried out "back to the shop, Mr. John, stick to plasters, pills, ointment boxes," and who called his poetry "calm, settled, . . . drivelling idiocy" — were attacking a foredoomed man. When Keats met Coleridge by chance in a Highgate lane, the truth was already perceptible. "After he had left us a little way," wrote the great,

dark poet of the supernatural, "he ran back and said, 'Let me carry away the memory, Coleridge, of having pressed your hand.' 'There is death in that hand,' I said, when Keats was gone."

The hand spoke truly, for in this brave and beautiful spirit, death and immortality now contended. And to the fever of this conflict, after his meeting with Fanny Brawne in 1818, was added the hopeless love of a man without health and without prospects. But even in sickness and distress, his genius continued to flame. In January, 1819, he finished *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and began *The Eve of St. Mark;* in February, the odes *On Indolence* and *On a Grecian Urn*, and the lines which begin "Bards of passion and of mirth"; by April 15, the ode *To Psyche*. A few days later he found that a nightingale was building her nest in Brown's garden. "Keats felt," said Brown, "a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his *Ode to a Nightingale*." At about this time Keats had finished *Hyperion;* in the same spring or the following summer, he wrote *La Belle Dame sans Merci;*

and in the autumn, during the "last good days of his life," composed *Lamia*, the tragedy of *Otho*, and his last ode, *To Autumn*. The list closes with two fragments, the *Cap and Bells* and the *Vision*, and with the sonnet written on board ship in his last voyage, — *Bright star, would I were as steadfast as thou art.*

What remains you can best learn from his friends' words and his own. One bitterly cold night, February 3, 1820, Keats came home to Brown's house in a high fever. "I entered his chamber," said Brown, "as he leapt into bed. On entering the cold sheets, before his head was on the pillow, he slightly coughed, and I heard him say, — 'That is blood from my mouth.' . . . He was examining a single drop of blood upon the sheet. 'Bring me the candle, Brown, and let me see this blood.' After regarding it steadfastly, he looked up in my face, with a calmness of countenance that I can never forget, and said, — 'I know the colour of that blood; — it is arterial blood; — I cannot be deceived in that colour; — that drop of blood is my death-warrant; — I must die.'"

With a surgeon's knowledge of his case, and a lover's despair, Keats accepted it manfully, and, on the whole, cheerfully. He wrote of himself: "For six months before I was taken ill I had not passed a tranquil day. Either that gloom overspread me, or I was suffering under some passionate feeling." But now, lying in bed, he thought "of green fields," and perceived "how astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties upon us!" That

chance drew near so rapidly that on September 18, 1820, he said farewell to many loving friends, and sailed for Naples with one devoted companion, Joseph Severn. In his anguish at leaving Fanny Brawne, he wrote to Brown from Italy: "I can bear to die — I cannot bear to leave her. . . . Oh God! . . . Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling cap scalds my head. . . . I see her — I hear her. . . . Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my breast. It surprises me that the human heart is capable of containing and bearing so much misery." But by degrees, as he lay dying at Rome, these intolerable pangs left him. Though he could not wholly believe, the kindness of the devoted Severn, a true man and noble Christian, helped his unbelief. "Poor Keats," wrote Severn, "has me ever by him, and shadows out the form of one solitary friend: he opens his eyes in great doubt and horror, but when they fall on me they close gently, open quietly and close again, till he sinks to sleep." — "Doctor," he asked patiently, "when will this posthumous life of mine come to an end?" And again he said — "I feel the flowers growing over me." On February 23, 1821, "about four," Severn has told us, "the approaches of death came on. 'Severn — I — lift me up — I am dying — I shall die easy; don't be frightened — be firm, and thank God it has come.'"

Keats was buried — as both Shelley and Severn were afterward — in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, near the pyramid of Caius Cestius.

II. Poems

"I hope," said Keats, in his preface to *Endymion*, "I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness." When you have read that poem, and his later *Hyperion*, you may judge for yourselves whether in his hands the beauties of Greek fable became any less bright. Lovers of Keats think not; and some, too zealous in his praise, have called Keats a poet of Greek life, and his spirit the Greek spirit. It is true that in the *Ode to Autumn* the imagery, the vivid, beautiful personification of that mellow season, is thoroughly pagan:—

> "Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
> Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
> Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
> Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
> Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
> Spares the next swath and all its twinéd flowers:
> And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook:
> Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
> Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours."

This is from the last great poem which Keats wrote; and in one of his earliest you will find a beautiful passage which begins —

> "Queen of the wide air; thou most lovely queen,"

and which describes the bridal night of Cynthia, goddess of the moon. In many other instances, the moon in

this poet's sky is not the pale weary satellite that Shelley watched and questioned, but the mystic form of Selene, as figured by the Greeks. Forces of nature Keats loved to think of as mythical beings, half human, half divine, like the daughter of Hyperion, when —

> "One hand she press'd upon that aching spot
> Where beats the human heart, as if just there
> Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain."

Yet you should remember that Keats, though he employed these figures of pagan speech, did not actually people his world with them, but used them as adornments. He is a Greek in his power to speak out freely all that is in him, whether it be simple or complex, new or old. The mythology of Hellas was to him always a wonder and a delight. But Keats was also, in the depths of his genius, a romantic poet who studied and recalled the beauties of Elizabethan fancy, and whose tales move through the enchanted forest of the Faery Queen.

"Poetry," he once wrote, "must surprise by a fine excess." The poet should be —

> "Filling every sense with spiritual sweets,
> As bees gorge full their cells."

This fine excess Keats drew not only from classic and mediæval story, but even more from nature, from his own outdoor world in England. Like Shakespeare, he was always one to

> ". . . watch intently Nature's gentle doings."

For this reason, because his mood was not that of a teacher or moralist but of a loving observer, Keats was

able to surprise and waylay those half-hidden bits of magic, in tranquillity or change, those little mysteries among the leaves, which most of us live and die without seeing.

> "Here are sweet peas, on tiptoe for a flight:
> With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,
> And taper fingers catching at all things,
> To bind them all about with tiny rings."

Beside a brook he sees the minnows —

> ". . . how they ever wrestle
> With their own sweet delight, and ever nestle
> Their silver bellies on the pebbly sand."

Behind the life which is in all these things, Keats rarely, if ever, suggests the presence — so real and so full of awe to Wordsworth — of a mighty impulse and everlasting purpose. Keats wanders afield, to "enjoy delight with liberty." In his early poems, the liberty is almost too roving, the beauty of details excessive; so that his friend Leigh Hunt was not unjust in accusing him of a "tendency to notice everything too indiscriminately, and without an eye to natural proportion and effect." In his narrative poems, the story often becomes tangled in flowery thickets; the foreground, though rich and lovely, has no great gaps through which the imagination may see into the distance; and the persons of his tale pause in some luxuriant place without activity or passion to make them dramatic. But these faults belonged to the poet's youth, and had left him, or were leaving him, when his power and his life were cut short. The poems in this book are not Keats's first wayward

attempts; they show how perfectly this spirit of liberty and delight had learned to select and to simplify, and without hovering too fondly over an image of beauty, to record it in happy words that linger and haunt.

With this felicity of language — often compared to Shakespeare's — Keats brings generous tribute to the great poets dead and gone, the "bards of passion and of mirth." The *Ode on the Poets*, the sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, and the *Lines on the Mermaid Tavern* are the golden coins with which Keats pays his reckoning and takes his seat among the glorious company, — true coin of the realm, stamped with Apollo's countenance. *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, containing, in the compass of a short ballad, all the dark beauty of mediæval fairyland and the obscure terror of warning dreams, conveys in elfin music the power with which Beauty, in all ages, holds her unrequited slaves. In the odes, *To Autumn*, *To a Nightingale*, and *On a Grecian Urn*, you will discover that odes, to be among the greatest in our language, need not follow tradition so far as to be declamatory or set above the pitch of ordinary music. These are quiet, meditative, with a kind of halcyon, autumnal beauty. There are no flights, pauses, and sudden swerves, no merely rhetorical fire, no changes from trumpet to flute, from lyre to sounding brass or full organ, such as Dryden used in *Alexander's Feast*. The music of Keats maintains an even tenor, or sinks as

> ". . .. in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
> Among the river sallows."

His odes open with no sweeping invocations, but with a minor melody which at first seems hardly more audible than a thought: —

> "Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
> Thou foster-child of silence and slow time."

It is this tranquillity of tone and of mood that allows Keats, unhurried by the changing rush and flow of the usual ode, to give in complete stanzas his clear and immortal pictures. Never has an ode contained a more vivid passage of description than his on the Grecian Urn: —

> "Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
> To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
> Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
> And all her silken flanks in garlands drest?
> What little town by river or sea shore
> Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
> Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
> And, little town, thy streets for evermore
> Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
> Why thou art desolate, can e'er return."

When later you come to know the whole range of Keats's poetry, you will see in the odes a growing melancholy, a sense, unknown in his earlier delighted freedom, that beauty is transient, that all living forms of beauty pass into oblivion. Keats came to feel that —

> ". . . in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine."

The author of the sonnets beginning "When I have

fears that I shall cease to be," and "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art," had all too much reason to reflect on the brevity of life and the certainty of death. In his last days Keats wrote: "If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me — nothing to make my friends proud of my memory; but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time, I would have made myself remembered." The great web of Keats's poetry was rent across when he was merely beginning, merely emerging from the style of youth into the chastened style of manhood, to see that great verse cannot be written luxuriously. "English," he said, two years before his death, "ought to be kept up." He saw, in other words, that "the false beauty proceeding from art" must give way to "the true voice of feeling." In his short poems this transformation had already come. Keats's longer poems were still to be written. But without these, in his brief span, with dignity, tenderness, and glory, he had told the world —

> "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' — that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

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SELECTIONS FROM KEATS

I

Ode on the Poets

Bards of Passion and of Mirth
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Have ye souls in heaven too,
Double-lived in regions new?

— Yes, and those of heaven commune
With the spheres of sun and moon;
With the noise of fountains wond'rous
And the parle[1] of voices thund'rous;
With the whisper of heaven's trees
And one another, in soft ease
Seated on Elysian lawns
Browsed by none but Dian's fawns;
Underneath large blue-bells tented,
Where the daisies are rose-scented,
And the rose herself has got
Perfume which on earth is not;
Where the nightingale doth sing
Not a senseless, trancéd thing,

[1] Discourse, parley.

But divine melodious truth;
Philosophic numbers smooth;
Tales and golden histories
Of heaven and its mysteries.

Thus ye live on high, and then
On the earth ye live again;
And the souls ye left behind you
Teach us, here, the way to find you,
Where your other souls are joying,
Never slumber'd never cloying.
Here, your earth-born souls still speak
To mortals, of their little week;
Of their sorrows and delights;
Of their passions and their spites;
Of their glory and their shame;
What doth strengthen and what maim: —
Thus ye teach us, every day,
Wisdom, though fled far away.

Bards of Passion and of Mirth
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Ye have souls in heaven too,
Double-lived in regions new!

II

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.

Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

— Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes

He stared at the Pacific — and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise —
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

III

Happy Insensibility

In a drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy tree,
Thy branches ne'er remember
Their green felicity:
The north cannot undo them
With a sleety whistle through them,
Nor frozen thawings glue them
From budding at the prime.

In a drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy brook,
Thy bubblings ne'er remember
Apollo's summer look;
But with a sweet forgetting

They stay their crystal fretting,
Never, never petting
About the frozen time.

Ah! would 'twere so with many
A gentle girl and boy!
But were there ever any
Writhed not at passéd joy?
To know the change and feel it,
When there is none to heal it,
Nor numbéd sense to steal it —
Was never said in rhyme.

IV

La Belle Dame sans Merci

'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms!
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

'I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.'

'I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful — a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

'I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;[1]
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

'I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

'She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said
"I love thee true."

'She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept and sigh'd full sore;
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

'And there she lullèd me asleep,
And there I dream'd — Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill's side.

'I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all:

[1] Belt.

They cried — "La belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!"

'I saw their starved lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gapéd wide,
And I awoke and found me here
On the cold hill's side.

'And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.'

V

Bright Star! would I were steadfast as thou art —
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient sleepless Eremite,[1]

The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors: —

No — yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair Love's ripening breast
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest;

Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever, — or else swoon to death.

[1] Hermit.

VI

The Terror of Death

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piléd books, in charact'ry
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;

When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;

And when I feel, fair Creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love — then on the shore

Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

VII

The Mermaid Tavern

Souls of Poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?
Have ye tippled drink more fine
Than mine host's Canary wine?

Or are fruits of Paradise
Sweeter than those dainty pies
Of venison? O generous food!
Drest as though bold Robin Hood
Would, with his Maid Marian,
Sup and bowse [1] from horn and can.

I have heard that on a day
Mine host's sign-board flew away
Nobody knew whither, till
An astrologer's old quill
To a sheepskin gave the story,
Said he saw you in your glory,
Underneath a new-old sign
Sipping beverage divine,
And pledging with contented smack
The Mermaid in the Zodiac.

Souls of Poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?

VIII

Ode To A Nightingale

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:

[1] Drink.

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness, —
That thou, light-wingéd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvéd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainéd mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,

But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalméd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a muséd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain —
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music: — Do I wake or sleep?

IX

To one who has been long in city pent,
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven, — to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.

Who is more happy, when, with heart's content,
Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair

Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair
And gentle tale of love and languishment?

Returning home at evening, with an ear
Catching the notes of Philomel, — an eye
Watching the sailing cloudlet's bright career,

He mourns that day so soon has glided by:
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.

X

Ode to Autumn

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease;
For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twinéd flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook:
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, —
While barréd clouds bloom the soft-dying day
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

XI

The Realm of Fancy

Ever let the Fancy roam;
Pleasure never is at home:
At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth,
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth;
Then let wingéd Fancy wander
Through the thought still spread beyond her:

Open wide the mind's cage-door,
She'll dart forth, and cloudward soar.
O sweet Fancy! let her loose;
Summer's joys are spoilt by use,
And the enjoying of the Spring
Fades as does its blossoming;
Autumn's red-lipp'd fruitage too,
Blushing through the mist and dew,
Cloys with tasting: What do then?
Sit thee by the ingle, when
The sear faggot blazes bright,
Spirit of a winter's night;
When the soundless earth is muffled,
And the cakéd snow is shuffled
From the ploughboy's heavy shoon;
When the Night doth meet the Noon
In a dark conspiracy
To banish Even from her sky.
Sit thee there, and send abroad,
With a mind self-overaw'd,
Fancy, high-commission'd: — send her!
She has vassals to attend her:
She will bring, in spite of frost,
Beauties that the earth hath lost;
She will bring thee, all together,
All delights of summer weather;
All the buds and bells of May,
From dewy sward or thorny spray;
All the heapéd Autumn's wealth,
With a still, mysterious stealth:

She will mix these pleasures up
Like three fit wines in a cup,
And thou shalt quaff it: — thou shalt hear
Distant harvest-carols clear;
Rustle of the reapéd corn;
Sweet birds antheming the morn:
And, in the same moment — hark!
'Tis the early April lark,
Or the rooks, with busy caw,
Foraging for sticks and straw.
Thou shalt, at one glance, behold
The daisy and the marigold;
White-plumed lilies, and the first
Hedge-grown primrose that hath burst;
Shaded hyacinth, alway
Sapphire queen of the mid-May;
And every leaf, and every flower
Pearléd with the self-same shower.
Thou shalt see the field-mouse peep
Meagre from its celléd sleep;
And the snake all winter-thin
Cast on sunny bank its skin;
Freckled nest-eggs thou shalt see
Hatching in the hawthorn-tree,
When the hen-bird's wing doth rest
Quiet on her mossy nest;
Then the hurry and alarm
When the bee-hive casts its swarm;
Acorns ripe down-pattering,
While the autumn breezes sing.

Oh, sweet Fancy! let her loose;
Everything is spoilt by use:
Where's the cheek that doth not fade,
Too much gazed at? Where's the maid
Whose lip mature is ever new?
Where's the eye, however blue,
Doth not weary? Where's the face
One would meet in every place?
Where's the voice, however soft,
One would hear so very oft?
At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth.
Let then wingéd Fancy find
Thee a mistress to thy mind:
Dulcet-eyed as Ceres' daughter,
Ere the God of Torment taught her
How to frown and how to chide;
With a waist and with a side
White as Hebe's, when her zone
Slipt its golden clasp, and down
Fell her kirtle to her feet,
While she held the goblet sweet,
And Jove grew languid. — Break the mesh
Of the Fancy's silken leash;
Quickly break her prison-string,
And such joys as these she'll bring.
— Let the wingéd Fancy roam,
Pleasure never is at home.

XII

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
  Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
  A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
  Of deities or mortals, or of both,
    In Tempé or the dales of Arcady?
  What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
  What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
    What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
  Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
  Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
  Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
    Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal — yet, do not grieve;
  She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
    For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
  Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unweariéd,
  For ever piping songs for ever new;

More happy love, more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest.
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede [1]
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

[1] Embroidery.

XIII

The Human Seasons

Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;
There are four seasons in the mind of man:
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:

He has his Summer, when luxuriously
Spring's honey'd cud of youthful thought he loves
To ruminate, and by such dreaming high
Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves

His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
He furleth close: contented so to look
On mists in idleness — to let fair things
Passed by unheeded as a threshold brook.

He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

ROBERT BROWNING

I. Life

Robert Browning, born in Camberwell on May 7, 1812, belonged — like most of the great English poets — to what their countrymen call the middle class. His father was a clerk in the Bank of England, his mother the daughter of William Wiedemann, a German ship-owner who had settled and married at Dundee. Their house, in the London suburb of Camberwell, was a quiet place, as their life was serene and happy. The poet's father, a man of intelligence and refinement, not only possessed such accomplishments as drawing and painting in water-colours, but was a student, a sensible critic, and a lover of books, pictures, and poetry. At dusk, in his library, he used to walk up and down with the little boy in his arms, singing him to sleep with fragments of Anacreon, — the Greek words set to old English tunes. He loved his son greatly. "My dear father," wrote Browning afterwards, "put me in a condition most favourable for the best work I was capable of. When I think of the many authors who have had to fight their way through all sorts of difficulties, I have no reason to be proud of my achievements. . . . He secured for me all the ease and comfort that a literary man needs to do good work. It would have been

shameful if I had not done my best to realize his expectations of me." Of his mother the poet said — "She was a divine woman." To his latest day he could hardly speak of her without tears in his eyes.

His boyhood was quiet and happy. He was an energetic boy, fond not only of books, pictures, and music, but of living things, which he collected in a small menagerie, — speckled frogs, monkeys, owls, hedgehogs. As for books, "the first . . . . I ever bought in my life," he tells us, was Ossian; and "the first composition I was ever guilty of, was something in imitation of Ossian." He wrote early and constantly. "I never can recollect not writing rhymes; . . . but I knew they were nonsense even then." Byron's poetry and fame soon captivated him, and inspired a feeling which he said he "always retained . . . in many respects. . . . I would at any time have gone to Finchley to see a curl of [Byron's] hair or one of his gloves . . . while Heaven knows that I could not get up enthusiasm enough to cross the room if at the other end of it all Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey were condensed into the little china bottle yonder." Browning's earliest poems — the unpublished *Incondita*, written at the age of twelve — were a boy's vision of Byronic romance.

Of his days in Mr. Ready's school at Peckham, where he remained till he was fourteen, there is little to say. He was not a schoolboy hero, like Keats. A few facts stand out in this uneventful period. One memorable night, among the elms above Norwood, he saw for the first time the lights of London, and was marvel-

lously affected by the spectacle of that distant, pulsating mystery. No less memorable was the day when, passing a small book-shop, he saw in the window, and bought, a copy of "Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poem: very scarce." He had never heard of Shelley; his family could tell him little about that social rebel and exile; but deep called unto deep, and Browning could not be satisfied until his mother, visiting London, had sent him down a parcel of Shelley's books. By a fortunate chance, she sent also three volumes of a second unknown, John Keats. Often in later life Browning recalled the glory of that May evening when these wonderful books rolled back the boundaries of his world, while two nightingales, in the laburnums and copper-beeches, sang in such rivalry as if they had been the spirits of the two great poets.

If these are the chief events of his boyhood, those of his youth are even fewer. He was not sent to either Oxford or Cambridge, but had private tutors at home, where he learned to ride and fence, to box and dance, to read French, to know more about music than any other English poet, and more about Greek and Italian history and literature than almost any other "man of the world." Man of the world he became, as genuinely as he was poet born. Mrs. Bridell-Fox has told how Browning, at this period of his life, called on her father, and finding him not at home, promptly sat down at the piano to play for her. "He was then slim and dark, and very handsome, and — may I hint it? — just a trifle of a dandy, addicted to lemon-coloured

kid gloves and such things, quite the glass of fashion and the mould of form. But full of 'ambition,' eager for fame, and what is more, determined to conquer fame and to achieve success." In middle age, and later, he is described by other writers as strong in the shoulder, slender in the waist, "a middle-sized, well set up, erect man, with somewhat emphatic gestures, and . . . a curiously strident voice," — a manly figure, thoughtful face, and conventional bearing. This most novel and unconventional poet was all his life a conventional man. He hated all "Bohemian" irregularity, lived as urbanely as other men, took pleasure in the forms of social life, and paid his bills as promptly as the practical banker, his father. In company, we are told, he was in fact taken for some lively financier. His mode of life in any man without his gifts — or without his famous friends — would have been commonplace.

Pauline, published in 1833, but far more *Paracelsus*, in 1835, won for Browning many of those friends, who, themselves admired, became admirers of his genius, or lovers of the man himself, or both. Among them were Leigh Hunt, John Stuart Mill, the "poor old lion" Landor, Thomas Carlyle, with many others. At a dinner, where not only Landor was present, but the great Wordsworth, their host, Serjeant Talfourd, proposing "The Poets of England," coupled with the toast the name of "Mr. Robert Browning, the author of *Paracelsus*." Wordsworth, leaning across the table, said — "I am proud to drink your health, Mr. Brown-

ing." And before the evening was over, the tragic actor Macready had made this youngest of the poets promise to write him a play. *Strafford*, the result of this promise, was performed at Covent Garden Theatre on May 1, 1837. Though the mismanagement of the theatre allowed it to run for only a few nights, the play was well received and, as Browning wrote afterward, was applauded by "a pitful of good-natured people."

His career as dramatist and poet was now fully begun. His published works form so long a list that we can mention only the more important. After the first three, already named, and after *Sordello*, in 1840, appeared *Pippa Passes*, in 1841; *King Victor and King Charles*, and the *Dramatic Lyrics*, in 1842; *The Return of the Druses*, and *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, in 1843; *Colombe's Birthday*, in 1844; *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, in 1845; and in 1846, *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy*. All these form parts I to VIII of *Bells and Pomegranates*. To them succeeded *Men and Women*, 1855; *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864; *The Ring and the Book*, 1868–69; *Balaustion's Adventure*, and *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, 1871; *Fifine at the Fair*, 1872; *Aristophanes' Apology*, and *The Inn Album*, 1875; *Pacchiarotto, and other Poems*, 1876; *The Agamemnon of Æschylus*, 1877; *Dramatic Idyls*, 1879–80; *Jocoseria*, 1883; *Ferishtah's Fancies*, 1884; and finally *Asolando*, 1889.

Throughout these long labours, Browning remained a vigorous, wholesome man, interested in many things—studying music, learning to paint pictures, making clay models and smashing them, analysing criminal cases

with all the relish of an amateur detective. Lockhart said that he liked Browning because he was not a literary man. The vanities and jealousies of little writers were not in him; he admired all kinds of good work, remained warm friends with many irritable brothers in genius. Though he had the temper of a fighting man, attacks on his own works, charges of obscurity and affectation, did not ruffle him. His attitude toward *Sordello* was characteristic. After Douglas Jerrold, recovering from serious illness, had put down the book in defeat and dismay, crying—"O God, I *am* an idiot!"—after Carlyle said that his wife had "read through *Sordello* without being able to make out whether 'Sordello' was a man, or a city, or a book,"—in short, after it had become humorous or fashionable not to understand Browning, he maintained the same manly position: "I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since."

He had long admired the poetry of Miss Elizabeth Barrett, a high-spirited, courageous, and already famous woman who for many years had been bed-ridden. Her father, obstinately believing that she would never recover, kept her in a darkened room, to which few visitors were admitted; but through a common friend, John Kenyon, her "fairy godfather," the two poets began a correspondence which has become famous. In 1846 they met, in the sick-room. It is a long and beautiful story, how the prince broke the hedge about this Sleeping Princess, and—when her father had forbidden her to seek health in Italy—how Browning, the punc-

tilious, conventional man, braved the world's opinion to rescue her. They were married quietly in St. Marylebone Church, on September 12, 1846, and as quietly made their way across the continent to Italy. In all the history of marriages, perhaps none was ever happier. Mrs. Browning was soon restored to health, to sunshine, and to brilliant friends. In the spring of 1849, at Florence, their son Robert was born. And in Florence, in June, 1861, after "a great love had kept her on earth" for fifteen years, Mrs. Browning died. The rest of her husband's life is summed up in his brave sentence — "I mean to keep writing, whether I like it or not."

Browning died at Venice, on December 12, 1889. He was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

II. Poems

Of Robert Browning's poetry it is possible that you have read little or nothing; but it is hardly possible, in such a case, that you have not heard more than one joke, good or bad, laughable or stupid, on the subject of his obscurity. These jokes have become hackneyed, yet perhaps they still tend to make persons who have not read Browning think him hard to understand. In his longer poems he is, indeed, anything but clear. Tennyson, after reading *Sordello*, said the opening line of the poem, —

> "Who will, may hear Sordello's story told,"

and the closing, —

> "Who would, has heard Sordello's story told,"

were the only lines he understood, and they were both lies. You, however, will have no call to read *Sordello* or any other long, perplexing poem, — it may be for years, and it may be forever. Should you find any given page obscure, at sight, the printed lines will become clearer as you read them aloud, because Browning, when he wrote, followed the order of spoken English rather than of written English. He has, moreover, many short poems, full of great beauty and meaning, in which neither beauty nor meaning should escape you if you will remember one simple and important fact.

This fact is, that Browning wrote the greater part of his verses, whether songs or stories, in a fashion wholly different from the fashion of his companion poets. The difference you will quickly see : except in comparatively rare instances, he does not speak to you directly out of his own heart, like Wordsworth, or Byron, or Shelley, or Keats, but indirectly out of the heart and from the lips of some real or imagined character. Browning is, in other words, a dramatic poet.

This does not mean that he is both poet and dramatist, as Shakespeare was. Though many persons have admired Browning's plays, you will discover, when you come to them later, that those plays lack some quality which audiences demand in the theatre. At all events, you will agree that Browning is not first and foremost a playwright, and yet that he is supreme in one province of the playwright's art, — a province which he annexed to the kingdom of poetry. He himself called certain of his poems " Dramatic Lyrics " and " Dramatic Idyls."

These form a class of poetry so new in Browning's time, so characteristic of his genius, and so much his favourite way of writing, that we always think of them as his own undisputed invention. Some, though not all, of his pieces in this book are dramatic lyrics or episodes, and will show you, briefly yet clearly, what Browning was fondest of writing and how he set about to write.

The poems which are not of this sort will easily explain themselves. The *Cavalier Tunes* are, as you will see, rousing songs roared out lustily by "great-hearted gentlemen," who have sat down with right English appetites to a table where the pasty is good and the wine plentiful, or who have jumped up in high spirits at the call of "Boots and Saddles," to ride out for Church and King. *Home-Thoughts, from Abroad* shows not only the longing of an exile, among the gaudy melon-flowers of Italy, for the sights and sounds of April in England, but also a keen eye for the little processes of Nature which make beautiful such fields and hedges as a man might see in any week-day ramble.

In *Home-Thoughts, from the Sea*, Browning recalls with gorgeous colour and triumphant tone, the places of victory, Gibraltar, Cadiz Bay, Trafalgar, — where England has taught him the proud lesson and service of patriotism. In both of these poems, he speaks with his own voice; as also in *The Lost Leader*, where he cries out, in both sorrow and indignation, not against a single deserter from a single cause, but against all deserters from all good causes. With his own voice, too, he narrates the smiling, mortal heroism of the young soldier

whose death was but an *Incident of the French Camp;* and in more deliberate lines tells of *The Boy and the Angel*, who changed places in order to prove that God demands praise from all His creatures, and rejoices no less in a poor workman's song at his bench than in "the Pope's great way" of praise.

The remaining pieces here set before you illustrate, in various manner and degree, Browning's dramatic habit. *Hervé Riel* is, to be sure, told by the poet, not by his spokesman; it begins in a narrative vein, and ends with an epilogue or commentary; but the scene of the episode is definitely and vividly kept on the deck of Damfreville's ship, the *Formidable*, where we see the brave and ready pilot at his work, we hear him laugh, and answer boldly, and holla "Anchor!", just as we hear his dialogue with Damfreville, and the cheers that rise under the ramparts of Solidor. Neither scene nor action is anything but dramatic. The poet's order is obeyed: —

> "In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
> Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle
> Aurore!"

In *Evelyn Hope* — though the poem is meditative and, as it were, silent — the first stanza discloses the scene as if for a play: —

> "Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
> Sit and watch by her side an hour.
> That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
> She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,

Beginning to die, too, in the glass;
Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink."

And though the following stanzas contain no action, they unfold the soliloquy of the principal actor who sits watching, and bends at last to shut the geranium leaf inside the dead girl's hand.

How They brought the Good News is confined, of course, to no single scene, but moves with fiery swiftness through league after league. It has been called a ballad of brave horses. Yet even here, as we gallop with Dirck and Joris through the night, the sunrise, and the glaring day, we have taken the place of the third, nameless hero, swung into his saddle, and galloped onward in all his exhilaration and impatience. We ourselves shove the hero aside — as Stevenson has finely said — to bathe in fresh experience. We see how —

"At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare through the mist at us galloping past."

The stirring ride is, after all, a narrative, but it starts with a rush that leaves us no time to question or to catch breath; we spring to the stirrup in the first line, and gallop till Roland halts in Aix.

Pheidippides, with an opening not so abrupt, is the one poem which may leave you puzzled until the action has begun, and perhaps after. Here, more than in any of the foregoing pieces, you must remember the one simple, important fact of which we spoke, — that

Browning is a lyrical dramatist. Here, more than ever, you must ask yourselves who it is that speaks. In his opening lines Browning is like an actor who appears in many disguises. This story of the glorious race from Athens to Sparta, from Marathon to the Acropolis, is told (at the outset, and nearly to the end) by the runner himself, — the exultant young Pheidippides, returning to hail the land which he saved by his speed. The beauties of the poem you are in no danger of overlooking. Of heroic temper, it runs and races as though with the feathered ankles of Mercury. It is "a field which the fire runs through."

One Word More, the beautiful lines in which Browning devotes himself and his whole achievement to his wife, will show you better than any words of prose in what mode he loved to practise his art. In the fifteenth stanza he says: —

> "Love, you saw me gather men and women,
> Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
> Enter each and all, and use their service,
> Speak from every mouth, — the speech, a poem.
> Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
> Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
> I am mine and yours — the rest be all men's,
> Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the fifty."

The moral, the doctrine of brave glad optimism which Browning everywhere enforces, you will in later reading piece together from many poems, and find yourselves the better for. A highly complex poet, Browning held a simple creed. In *Hervé Riel* and in a

score of other pieces, he chose for his heroes no great shining figures, splendidly rewarded. The pilot, an obscure, plain man, gained only the cheers aboard ship and a day ashore to see his wife. His feat was not set off to the world or trumpeted abroad. Success, to Browning, never means riches, or fame, or even the fulfilment of a man's or a woman's purpose in life. Defeat, to him, was not by any means failure. The human spirit, he tells us again and again, may still be unconquerable even in disaster, when all the odds of life and fate are dead against us, as were those grim watchers on the hills who mocked Childe Roland at the Dark Tower. The success, the reward in such a desperate pass, is the knowledge that we can do our best proudly, as Childe Roland blew the last challenge on his slug-horn. The wisdom of Browning is not the wisdom of this world. Like Ecclesiastes, he might say: —

"This wisdom have I seen under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:

"There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and built great bulwarks against it.

"Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

"Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength, nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

"The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools."

The moral and the motive of this Biblical story might be those of almost any dramatic episode in

Browning. To him, glory and honour lie with the man who has done good work, and with that man only. The world may be full of errors and defeats and misjudgments. But Browning, nobly audacious, declares that "God's in his Heaven, All's right with the world!" Old age, the great probability of failure, death at last, wait for us in that world; but meanwhile this courageous poet would have us —

> "Strive, and hold cheap the strain,
> Learn, nor account the pang,
> Dare, never grudge the throe."

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SELECTIONS FROM BROWNING

I

Cavalier Tunes

I

MARCHING ALONG

I

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're —

(*Chorus*) *Marching along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

III

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here,

(*Chorus*) *Marching along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

IV

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

(*Chorus*) *March we along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

2

GIVE A ROUSE

I

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

II

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?

Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?
(*Chorus*) *King Charles, and who'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?
(*Chorus*) *King Charles, and who'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

3

BOOT AND SADDLE

I

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray,
(*Chorus*) *Boot, saddle, to horse and away!*

II

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay —
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

III

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,[1]
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

IV

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
I've better counsellors; what counsel they?
(*Chorus*) "*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

II

Incident of the French Camp

I

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans
That soar, to earth may fall,

[1] Faith.

Let once my army-leader Lannes
Waver at yonder wall," —
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

III

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect —
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace
We've got you Ratisbon!
The Marshal's in the market-place,
And you'll be there anon
To see your flag-bird flap his vans
Where I, to heart's desire,
Perched him!" The chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V

The chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes

A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes;
"You're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
"I'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

III

The Lost Leader

I

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat —
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags — were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us, — they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
— He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II

We shall march prospering, — not through his presence ;
Songs may inspirit us, — not from his lyre ;
Deeds will be done, — while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire :
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God !
Life's night begins : let him never come back to us !
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part — the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again !
Best fight on well, for we taught him — strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own ;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne !

IV

"How they brought the good News from Ghent to Aix"

I

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he ;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three ;
"Good speed ! " cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew ;
" Speed ! " echoed the wall to us galloping through ;

Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique[1] right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Düffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

IV

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

[1] The pommel of the saddle.

V

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track ;
And one eye's black intelligence, — ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, " Stay spur!
Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
We'll remember at Aix " — for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky ;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff ;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And " Gallop," gasped Joris, " for Aix is in sight ! "

VIII

"How they'll greet us!" — and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X

And all I remember is, — friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

V

Evelyn Hope

I

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
  Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
  She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die, too, in the glass;
  Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
  Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

II

Sixteen years old when she died!
  Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name:
It was not her time to love; beside,
  Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
  And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
  And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
  What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
  Made you of spirit, fire and dew—

And, just because I was thrice as old
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was naught to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, naught beside?

IV

No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V

But the time will come, at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red —
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;

Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

VII

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while!
My heart seemed full as it could hold;
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,— I will give you this leaf to keep:
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

VI

Home-Thoughts, from Abroad

Oh, to be in England now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm tree bole [1] are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England — now!

[1] Trunk.

And after April, when May follows
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops — at the bent spray's edge —
That's the wise thrush: he sings each song twice over
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And, though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
— Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

VII

Home-Thoughts, from the Sea

Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the Northwest died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
In the dimmest Northeast distance dawned Gibraltar grand and gray;
"Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?" — say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

VIII

The Boy and the Angel

Morning, evening, noon and night
"Praise God!" sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he laboured, long and well;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever, at each period,
He stopped and sang, "Praise God!"

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, "Well done;
I doubt not thou art heard, my son:

"As well as if thy voice to-day
Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

"This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, "Would God that I
Might praise Him, that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in heaven, " Nor day nor night
Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth ;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well ;

And morning, evening, noon and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew :
The man put off the stripling's hue :

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay :

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

(He did God's will ; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, " A praise is in mine ear ;
There is no doubt in it, no fear :

" So sing old worlds, and so
New worlds that from my footstool go.

"Clearer loves sound other ways:
I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'Twas Easter Day: he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,[1]
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite:

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer:

And rising from the sickness drear,
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

"I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell,
And set thee here; I did not well.

[1] Clothed.

"Vainly I left my angel-sphere,
Vain was thy dream of many a year.

"Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped —
Creation's chorus stopped!

"Go back and praise again
The early way, while I remain.

"With that weak voice of our disdain,
Take up creation's pausing strain.

Back to the cell and poor employ:
Resume the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.

One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side.

IX

One Word More

I

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century [1] of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas:
These, the world might view — but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her lifetime?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving —
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas —
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that's left with lilies in the Louvre —
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple

[1] Hundred.

Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the treasure!"
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he—"Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet—"Then I stopped my painting."

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those "people of importance:"
We and Bice[1] bear the loss for ever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient —
Using nature that's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry, —
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem, —
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,

[1] Beatrice.

Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked — "Shall smiting help us?"
When they drank and sneered — "A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks — "But drought was pleasant."
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savours of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness, the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude —
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel —
"Egypt's flesh-pots — nay, the drought was better."

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us —
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,

Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge[1] with flowerets.
He who blows through bronze, may breathe through silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth, — the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
I am mine and yours — the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland, or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,

[1] Margin of a prayer-book.

Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house-roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman —
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats — him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal —
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire

Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure — the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you — yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side — there's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you —
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song — and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel — borne, see, on my bosom!

X

Hervé Riel

I

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French — woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to St. Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II

'Twas the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!

Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick — or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will!"

III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,
Shall the '*Formidable*' here with her twelve and eighty guns
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter where 'tis ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,

For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V

"Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate — first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI

And, "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell

On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?[1]
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this '*Formidable*' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,
— Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I've nothing but my life, — here's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!

[1] Pours out at the mouth.

Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace!
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
See, safe through shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past,
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate
Up the English come—too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,

Gnash their teeth and glare askance
  As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired[1] Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
  "This is Paradise for Hell!
  Let France, let France's King
  Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
  "Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
  Not a symptom of surprise
  In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
  Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
  You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.

[1] Ramparted.

Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not
Damfreville."

X

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?—
Since 'tis ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.

Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!
You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

XI

Pheidippides

Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν.

First I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons [1] and heroes, honour to all!
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise.
— Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer,
Now, henceforth and forever, — O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan — patron I call!

[1] Lesser divinities; guardian spirits.

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!
See, 'tis myself here standing alive, no spectre that speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,
Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has come!
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;
Razed to the ground is Eretria — but Athens, shall Athens sink,
Drop into dust and die — the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die, with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?
Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er destruction's brink?
How, — when? No care for my limbs! — there's lightning in all and some —
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens — Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice, — each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering, — the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch from dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athene, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come, — does Athens ask aid, — may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment — too weighty the issue at stake!
Count we no time lost time which lags through respect to the gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds
In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we — who judgment suspend."

Athens, — except for that sparkle, — thy name, I had mouldered to ash !
That sent a blaze through my blood ; off, off and away was I back,
— Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false and the vile !
Yet " O gods of my land ! " I cried, as each hillock and plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them again,
" Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honours we paid you erewhile ?
Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation ! Too rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack !

" Oak and olive and bay, — I bid you cease to enwreathe
Brows made bold by your leaf ! Fade at the Persian's foot,
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave !
Rather I hail thee, Parnes, — trust to thy wild waste tract !
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain ! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure ? — at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute ! "

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:
"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?
Athens to aid? Though the dive were through Erebos, thus I obey —
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge
Better!" — when — ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that are?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he — majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof;
All the great god was good in the eyes grave-kindly — the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.
"Halt, Pheidippides!" — halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious began:
"How is it, — Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?
Ay, and still, and for ever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia — so much as strews not the soil — is cast in the sea,
Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!'"
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
— Fennel — I grasped it a-tremble with dew — whatever it bode)
"While, as for thee" . . . But enough! He was gone.
If I ran hitherto —
Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens — earth no more, the air was my road:
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon rare!

Then spoke Miltiades. "And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed, — what gift is promised thyself?
Tell it us straightway, — Athens the mother demands of her son!"
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance — "Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow, —
Pound — Pan helping us — Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away for ever; and then, — no Athens to save, —
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave, —
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees, — recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full — rewarding him — so!"

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,
Till in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died — the bliss!

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still "Rejoice!" — his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy for ever, — the noble strong man
Who could race like a god, bear the face of a god, whom a god loved so well;
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously — once to shout, thereafter be mute:
"Athens is saved!" — Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

XII

My Last Duchess

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart — how shall I say? — too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed: she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace — all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, — good! but thanked
Somehow — I know not how — as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech — (which I have not) — to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark" — and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
— E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

XIII

Up at a Villa — Down in the City

(As distinguished by an Italian Person of Quality)

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!
There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;
While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a beast.

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!
— I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's turned wool.

But the city, oh the city — the square with the houses! Why?
They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something to take the eye!
Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry;

You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who hurries by;
Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the sun gets high;
And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted properly.

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by rights,
'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off the heights:
You've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen steam and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint grey olive trees.

Is it better in May, I ask you? You've summer all at once;
In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers well,
The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain to spout and splash!
In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine such foambows flash

On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle and pash
Round the lady atop in her conch — fifty gazers do not abash,
Though all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in a sort of sash.

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,
Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.
Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix i' the corn and mingle,
Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.
Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is shrill,
And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous firs on the hill.
Enough of the seasons, — I spare you the months of the fever and chill.

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells begin:
No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:
You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin.
By and by there's the travelling doctor gives pills, lets blood, draws teeth;
Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.

At the post-office such a scene-picture — the new play, piping hot!
And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves were shot.
Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes,
And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new law of the Duke's!
Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don So-and-so,
Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome, and Cicero,
"And moreover," (the Sonnet goes rhyming,) "the skirts of Saint Paul has reached,
Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous than ever he preached."
Noon strikes, — here sweeps the procession! our Lady borne smiling and smart
With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords stuck in her heart!
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife;
No keeping one's haunches still: it's the greatest pleasure in life.

But bless you, it's dear — it's dear! fowls, wine, at double the rate.
They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays passing the gate

It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not the city!
Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still — ah, the pity, the pity!
Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls and sandals,
And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding the yellow candles;
One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with handles,
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals:
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.
Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

NOTES

LORD BYRON

41. On one of these columns Byron's name is carved. [See Naef's *Guide* quoted by Mr. E. H. Coleridge.]

42. The large, white-walled Château de Chillon stands on the shores of the Lake of Geneva, between the Alps and the entrances of the Rhone. [See Naef.]

415. Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, 1812.

512. Pricking on. Cf. Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Canto I, l. 1. This may be one of the many reminiscences of older poetry with which Byron's remarkable memory was stored.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

209. "There are [those] who ask not."

257. Two Voices. The voice of the sea is that of England, the voice of the mountain is of Switzerland, which was usurped, in 1800, by the French, under Napoleon.

XI. Venice was taken by the French in 1797.

351. Cf. Milton's *Lycidas*, l. 37.

628. The family name of the Marquis of Queensberry is Douglas.

757. Cf. previous lines 99, 100.

XXIX. This poem contains many quotations from a beautiful ballad by Hamilton of Bangour (1704–1754) called *The Braes of Yarrow*. Certain of the passages reproduced will be found in the stanzas below.

"Sweet smells the birk, green grows, green grows the grass,
Yellow on Yarrow's bank the gowan,
Fair hangs the apple frae the rock,
Sweet the wave of Yarrow flowin'.

"Flows Yarrow sweet? as sweet, as sweet flows Tweed,
As green its grass, its gowan as yellow,
As sweet smells on its braes the birk,
The apple frae the rock as mellow.

"Fair was thy love, fair, fair indeed thy love;
In flowery bands thou him didst fetter;
Though he was fair and weil beloved again,
Than me he never lo'ed thee better.

"Busk ye, then busk, my bonny, bonny bride;
Busk ye, busk ye, my winsome marrow;
Busk ye, and lo'e me on the banks of Tweed,
And think nae mair on the Braes of Yarrow."

XXXVI. "Written soon after the death, by shipwreck, of Wordsworth's brother John." [Palgrave.]

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

310. Interlunar swoon is explained by Palgrave as the "interval of the moon's invisibility."

531. "Arcturus never sets; hence the ever blooming daisies are called Arcturi." [Alexander.]

772. The Maenads were the frenzied followers of Dionysus.

822. Mr. Palgrave has given an appropriate title to lines taken from Shelley's drama, *Prometheus Unbound.*

840. Stain. In the opinion of several editors, Shelley here meant "strain."

859. "Thoughts" depends upon "on" in the following line.

JOHN KEATS

51. Keats has confused Cortez and Balboa.

III. Palgrave has supplied a title "that the aim of the piece following may be grasped more clearly."

V. "This beautiful sonnet was the last word of a youth in whom, if the fulfilment may ever safely be prophesied from the promise, England lost one of the most rarely gifted in the long roll of her poets." [Palgrave.]

158. Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and other "poets dead and gone" had frequented the Mermaid.

ROBERT BROWNING

I. These songs have to do with the uprising for King Charles I against Parliament, in 1640.

IV. This poem has no historical basis.

IX. *One Word More* was originally the final poem in the collection called *Men and Women*.

602. **Grève.** Sands left by the outgoing tide, near St. Malo.

686–689. This refers to statues and other memorials in the Louvre.

702. **Archons.** Magistrates. — **Tettix.** A golden cicada worn as an emblem.

704. The myrtle wreath was the badge of the messenger.

776. **Fennel.** "*Fennel field,* in Greek *Marathon;* and Pan meant when he gave Pheidippides the bunch of fennel to signify the place where the victory would be won." [Miss Porter and Miss Clarke.]

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